

# Sociology and socialization assignment

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Socialization Socialization has had diverse meanings in the social sciences, partly because a number of disciplines claim it as a central process. In its most common and general usage, the term "socialization" refers to the process of interaction through which an individual (a novice) acquires the norms, values, beliefs, attitudes, and language characteristic of his or her group. In the course of acquiring these cultural elements, the individual self and personality are created and shaped.

Socialization therefore addresses two important problems in social life: societal continuity from one generation to the next and human development. Different disciplines have emphasized different aspects of this process. Anthropologists tend to view socialization primarily as cultural transmission from one generation to the next, sometimes substituting the term "enculturation" for socialization (Herskovits 1948).

Anthropological interest in socialization or enculturation coincided with the emergence of the "culture and personality" orientation of the late 1920s and 1930s, when the works of Mead (1928), Benedict (1934), and Malinowski (1927) focused on cultural practices affecting child rearing, value transmission, and personality development and helped shape the anthropological approach to socialization. Much of the work in the culture and personality field was influenced by psychoanalytic theory.

Contemporary cultural anthropology is guided less by psychoanalytic theory and more by social constructionist theories (such as symbolic interactionism), which view socialization as a collective and interpretive process of reality construction involving the reproduction of culture. This

orientation has been shaped largely by the work of Geertz (1973), whose influence is also evident in sociological work on socialization, such as that of Corsaro and Eder (1995).

Psychologists are less likely to emphasize the transmission of culture and more likely to emphasize various aspects of individual development (Goslin 1969). There is considerable diversity within psychology in regard to the aspect of socialization studied. For developmental psychologists, particularly those influenced by Piaget (1926), socialization is largely a matter of cognitive development, which typically is viewed as a combination of social influence and maturation. For behavioural psychologists, socialization is synonymous with learning patterns of behaviour.

For clinical psychologists and personality theorists, it is viewed as the establishment of character traits, usually within the context of early childhood experiences. The subfield of child development is most closely associated with the topic of socialization within psychology, where socialization is largely equated with child rearing (Clausen [1968] provides a historical overview of socialization in these disciplines). Political science has shown some interest in socialization, but in a limited sense.

Its studies have not gone much beyond political socialization: the process by which political attitudes and orientations are formed. However, a different and more esoteric use of the term occasionally appears in this literature: socialization as "collectivization," that is, the transformation of capitalism to socialism and/or communism. Within sociology, there have been two main

orientations toward socialization. One views socialization primarily as the learning of social roles.

From this perspective, individuals become integrated members of society by learning and internalizing the relevant roles and statuses of the groups to which they belong (Brim 1966). This view has been present in some form from the beginnings of sociology as a discipline but has been most closely associated with structural functionalist perspectives. The other, more prevalent sociological orientation views socialization mainly as self-concept formation. The development of self and identity in the context of intimate and reciprocal relations is considered the core of socialization.

This view is closely associated with the symbolic interactionist perspective, a synthesis of various strands of pragmatism, behaviourism, and idealism that emerged in the 1920s and 1930s in the writings of a number of scholars at the University of Chicago, especially Mead (1934). In Mead's writings, the self is a reflexive, thoroughly social phenomenon that develops through language or symbolic interaction. Language enables the development of role-taking, by which the individual is able to view himself or herself from the perspective of another person. This becomes the basis for selfhood and the interpenetration of self and society.

Mead and other symbolic interactionists have argued that self and society are two sides of the same coin. The basis for their assertion is that the content of selfconceptions (e. g. , identities) reflects the aspects of the social process with which the individual is involved through the internalization of role identities, values, and meanings. This internalization in turn reproduces

society. From the interactionist perspective, both self and society depend on the same process of social interaction by which "realities" are created and constantly negotiated (Gecas 1982).

For contemporary interactionists as well, socialization is distinguished from other types of learning and other forms of social influence by its relevance for self-conceptions, that is, for people's thoughts and feelings about themselves. As such, socialization is not merely the process of learning rules or norms or behavior patterns; it is a matter of learning these things only to the extent to which they become part of the way people think of themselves. The mark of successful socialization is the transformation of social control into self-control.

This is accomplished largely through the development of identities, the various labels and characteristics attributed to the self. Commitment to identities (such as son, mother, professor, honest person) is a source of motivation for individuals to act in accordance with the values and norms implied by those identities (Foote 1951; Stryker 1980; Gecas 1986). The focus on identity also emphasizes the membership component of socialization: To be socialized is to belong to a social group.

Socialization as identity formation occurs through a number of more specific processes associated with self-concept development: reflected appraisals, social comparisons, self-attributions, and identification (Gecas and Burke [1995] and Rosenberg [1979] discuss these processes). Reflected appraisals, based on Cooley's (1902) "looking-glass self" metaphor, refer to people's perceptions of how others see and evaluate them. To some extent people

come to see themselves as they think others (particularly significant others) see them.

People also develop conceptions of themselves with regard to specific attributes by comparing themselves to others (social comparisons) and making self-inferences from observing their own actions and their consequences (self-attributions). Particularly important to socialization as identity formation is the process of identification. Initially used by Sigmund Freud, this concept refers to the child's emotional attachment to the parent and desire to be like the parent; as a consequence, the child internalizes and adopts the parent's values, beliefs, and other characteristics.

Among other things, through identification with the parent, the child becomes more receptive to parental influence. Identification also is used to refer to the imputation or ascription of identities. Here the focus is on the establishment of identities in social interaction, which is an important aspect of defining situations and constructing realities. This also has important socializing consequences, as much of the literature on labeling, stereotyping, and expectancy effects attests. Content and Contexts of Socialization

Much research on socialization has been concerned with identifying the aspects of the socializee's development that are affected by particular agents and contexts of socialization and through particular processes. The focus has been primarily on the family context, in which the initial or primary socialization of the individual takes place. Studies of child rearing in "normal" as well as "abnormal" situations (e. g. , institutionalized children, "closet children"" feral, children") have identified a number of conditions that

must be present for primary socialization to take place, that is, for the child to become a person.

These conditions include the use of symbolic interaction (language) in the context of an intimate, nurturing relationship between an adult and a child. These conditions are necessary for the initial sense of self to emerge and for normal cognitive and even physical development to take place. The claim that the family (in some form) is a universal feature of human societies is based in large part on this important socialization function. Parental support continues to be important in the socialization of offspring through childhood, adolescence, and beyond.

It is one of the most robust variables in the literature on child rearing. Parental support has been found to be positively related to a child's cognitive development, moral behavior, conformity to adult standards, self-esteem, academic achievement, and social competence. Conversely, lack of parental support is associated with negative socialization outcomes for children and adolescents: low self-esteem, delinquency, deviance, drug use, and various other problem behaviors (Rollins and Thomas 1979; Peterson and Hann 1999).

Parental control is almost as prominent as support in the socialization literature. "Control" refers to the degree to and the manner in which parents attempt to place constraints on a child's behavior. Other terms used for this dimension of parenting are punishment, discipline, restrictiveness, permissiveness, protectiveness, supervision, strictness, and monitoring. Parental control is a more complicated variable than is parental support. It is

necessary to distinguish different types or styles of control because they frequently have opposite socialization consequences.

An important distinction is that between "authoritarian" and "authoritative" control (Baumrind 1978) or "coercion" and "induction" (Rollins and Thomas 1979). Authoritarian or coercive control (control based on force, threat, or physical punishment) is associated with negative or unfavorable socialization outcomes, whereas authoritative or inductive control (control based on reason and explanation) has positive outcomes. The most powerful models of parental influence in the socialization of children are those which combine the dimensions of support and control.

Parents are most effective as agents of socialization when they express a high level of support and exercise inductive control. In these conditions, children are most likely to identify with their parents, internalize parental values and expectations, use parents as their models, and become receptive to attempts at parental influence. Conversely, low parental support and reliance on coercive control are associated with unfavorable socialization outcomes (for reviews of this literature, see Peterson and Rollins 1987; Maccoby and Martin 1983; and Rollins and Thomas 1979).

Parental support and control cover much of the ground in the research on child rearing but not all of it. Other important socialization variables here are extent of parental involvement with the child (e. g. , time spent), level of performance expectations, extent to which political or religious beliefs and value systems are taught to the child by the parent, and various characteristics of the parent, such as patience, tolerance, honesty, integrity,



competence, and age and sex (of parent and child). Many factors affect the process and outcomes of family socialization.

Much of the socialization that takes place in the family involves learning appropriate role behavior associated with the various family positions. For the child, the most significant of these behaviors involve sex and age roles. Through processes of reinforcement from parents and others, identification with various role models, and parental admonitions and instructions, a child is socialized into the behavioral expectations associated with these roles. Of the two, sex roles have received more of the research attention on role learning in the family (Block [1983] provides a review).

This research suggests that sex-role socialization is extensive (usually starting at birth with differential treatment of male and female infants), pervasive (various agents and contexts of socialization), and consequential for a wide range of other individual and social outcomes. A prominent theme in much contemporary research on sex-role socialization is that the differential treatment that emphasizes "masculine" characteristics for boys and "feminine" characteristics for girls is detrimental to the development of both girls and boys and to the relationship between the sexes (Bem [1974] discusses the virtues of androgyny).

This research reflects the ethos of equality between the sexes in most modern societies. Most studies of socialization within the family assume a unidirectional influence from parent to child. Parents typically are viewed as agents of socialization (part of the job description of a parent), and children as objects of socialization. Given the disparities in power, status, and

competence between parent and child, it is justifiably assumed that the direction of influence is mainly from parent to child.

However, it has become increasingly evident that socialization is a reciprocal process, with children influencing parents as well. Over the past few decades, the thinking with regard to socialization processes has shifted from unidirectional to bidirectional and reciprocal models (Corsaro and Eder 1995; Gecas 1981). For example, in considering the association between parental punishment and a child's deviant behavior, which is one of the most consistent findings in socialization research, it can be argued that the child's behavior is both a consequence and a cause of the parental behavior.

That is, a child's aggressive or deviant behavior may elicit more punitive parental behavior as well as being affected by the parental behavior.

Socialization increasingly is viewed as reciprocal, even though the degree of influence is typically not equal. Besides parents and other adult kin, siblings serve as agents of socialization within the family context. As family size increases, more of the socialization of the younger children is taken on by their older siblings, either by default or because the parents delegate this responsibility to the older children.

Some have argued that this puts younger children in large families at a disadvantage with regard to cognitive development, since they have relatively less contact with the most competent and committed family members, the parents (Zajonc 1976). However, these findings, based mostly on cross-sectional data, have not gone unchallenged (Galbraith 1982; Blake 1989). An increasingly pervasive agent of socialization in contemporary

families is television. Children spend more time watching television than at any other activity except school and sleep (Bronfenbrenner 1970).

The purpose of most television programs children watch is typically not to socialize or educate but to entertain and sell products. However, a good deal of unintended socialization is likely to occur, from shaping conceptions of reality (e. g. , sex roles and ethnic stereotypes) to styles of behavior and tastes. In general, television is perceived as having a negative influence on children, with the exception of a few educational programs on public television. Much of the concern has focused on the extensive violence and sexual themes and situations in television programs.

Bandura et al. ' s (1963) work on modeling has persuasively shown that exposure to aggressive behavior tends to increase aggression in the viewer. Along with its undesirable consequences for child socialization, Bronfenbrenner (1970) observes that television is detrimental to child development with regard to the behavior it prevents, that is, the human interaction that is forgone in the course of being a passive viewer. The role of television as an agent of socialization in families seems to be increasing by default as the amount of contact between parents and their children decreases.

Various social forces (such as increasing numbers of working mothers, single-parent families, dual-career families, and the professionalization of child care) have decreased the amount of parent-child interaction and thus parents' role as a socializing agent. This vacuum has been filled increasingly by the child's involvement with television and with peers. For children in

American society, television, peer groups, and school are increasingly important agents of socialization. Like the family, the school is an institution whose mandate is to socialize children.

The school's mission, however, is more narrowly defined than is that of the family and is concerned primarily with the formal instruction and the development of children's cognitive skills. In this sense, the school context is less involved in primary socialization (i. e. , the development of basic values, beliefs, motivations, and conceptions of the self) and more involved in secondary socialization (i. e. , the development of knowledge and skills). This is not a very precise distinction, however.

In the course of the socialization experienced in school, things other than skills and knowledge also are learned, such as norms, values, attitudes, and various aspects of a child's personality and self-concept. Much more is typically learned in school than what is explicitly taught. Many activities associated with school (specifically in the classroom) have implications for a child's self-concept (Hewitt 1998). For example, one of the most important activities involves evaluation of the student's performance by the teacher: performance on tests, class reports, presentations, assignments, and the like.

Success in these activities, based on one's own efforts, is good for self-esteem and builds confidence in one's abilities. However, failure is not, and public failure is even worse. School provides numerous opportunities for public failure as well as public success. One of the consequences of performance evaluations may be the categorization or "labeling" of

students, by teachers as well as others, as " smart," " dumb," " slow learner," " underachiever," and so on.

Negative as well as positive labels affect the way in which others respond to a person and, through their responses, reinforce and shape that person in the labeled direction. This process is called " expectancy effects" ( Jones 1977) or " self-fulfilling prophecy" (Merton 1957). Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) found that teachers' expectations of students, even when based on erroneous information, had a significant effect on how students developed over the course of the school year: When the teacher was led to believe that a student would be a " slow learner," that student was more likely to do poorly in class.

Labeling and expectancy effects occur in most socialization contexts and have important consequences for self-concept development. However, students, like other socializees, are not passive recipients of the pressures they experience. Covington and Beery (1976) propose that two fundamentally different motivation patterns emerge in schools as a result of these pressures: One is oriented toward striving for success, and the other toward avoiding failure.

Failure-avoiding strategies (such as nonparticipation, withdrawal, procrastination, and putting off work assignments until too late) are attempts to disassociate one's performance from one's ability and worth. Failure then can be attributed to lack of effort or to external circumstances (less damaging attributions for the self), not to lack of ability (a more damaging attribution). This is a form of role distancing, the separation of the self from

the behavior required of a role occupant; it is also an obstacle to school achievement.

As Covington and Beery (1976) point out, failure-avoiding strategies are self-defeating: In their attempts to avoid feelings of failure, these students increase the probability of actual failure. For some students this is one of the unintended and undesirable consequences of classroom socialization. In the process of socializing students toward achievement and mastery (desirable outcomes), pressures are generated that may result in undesirable adaptations. The third most important context for the socialization of children and adolescents is the peer group.

In terms of structure and function, the peer group is a very different context from family and school. Unlike those two contexts, it is not the "job" of peers to socialize each other, even though a great deal of childhood socialization occurs in this context, some of it in reaction against the socialization experienced in the family and school. There are several important features of the peer group as a context of socialization. Most important, it is a voluntary association, and for most children it is the first.

This permits greater freedom of choice regarding associations in the group. A second important feature is that association is between status equals. Consequently, interaction is more likely to be based on egalitarian norms. Status distinctions emerge, of course, but are more likely to be based on achievement and negotiation. However, the basic relationship within peer groups is not hierarchical; rather, it is the friendship bond, based on equality,

mutual tolerance, and concern. Third, the peer group is an arena for the exercise of independence from adult control.

As such, it is often the context for the development of values, norms, and behavior in opposition to those of adults (such as the subcultures described by Coleman [1961] and in much of the literature on juvenile delinquency). Fourth, children's peer groups, in contemporary American society at least, typically are segregated by sex and differ in organizational patterns: Girls' peer groups tend to feature closely knit and egalitarian friendships, whereas boys' peer groups tend to be loosely knit, larger groups with clear status hierarchies.

An important socialization consequence of intensive association with same-sex peers and involvement in sex-typed activities is that this strongly reinforces identification and belongingness with members of the same sex and contributes to the development of stereotypical attitudes toward members of the opposite sex. Not only sex-role identity but also much of sexual socialization during childhood occur in the context of peer rather than parent-child associations, since parents are much less interested in discussing sexual matters with their children than are the children's peers (Fine 1987; Corsaro and Eder 1990).

Peers provide an alternative reference group for children as well as an alternative source of self-esteem and identity. For these reasons, attachment to peers may be even stronger than attachment to family, especially for adolescents. The socialization experienced by adults generally falls in the category of secondary socialization, building on the socialization experiences

of childhood. Much of this is role-specific (Brim 1968), that is, learning the knowledge and skills required for the performance of specific adult roles, such as occupation, marriage, and parenthood.

As individuals become committed to the roles they play, they come to identify themselves and think of themselves in terms of these role-identities (Stryker 1980). Since work is a dominant activity and setting for most adult men and women, much of adult socialization involves either preparation for an occupation or career (which usually takes place specialized schools or training programs such as law school, medical school, and college) or on-the-job training. The work setting can have a substantial socializing effect on workers, affecting more than just their knowledge and skills.

Kohn and Schooler (1983) have shown how certain occupational conditions affect the development of a worker's values and personality. Specifically, they found that work that is routine, closely supervised, and relatively uncomplicated gives rise to values of conformity, whereas work that is complex and encourages self-direction increases the value workers place on independence and autonomy. Kanter (1977) found that the nature of work relations, particularly the structure of opportunity on the job, affects workers' attitudes and behaviors as a consequence of their adaptations to the work situation.

Workers' adaptations to their work situations do not necessarily lead to commitment to the job or self-investment in terms of the occupational role. On the contrary, a prevalent theme in much of the sociological literature on work and workers (especially that with a Marxist perspective) deals with the



alienating consequences of work in capitalist societies. Many other contexts have socializing consequences for adults: family, political and religious organizations, recreational settings, and voluntary associations.

The socialization that takes place in these contexts can be considered “developmental” (Wheeler 1966) because it builds on previous socialization and is a continuation and expansion of past socialization experiences.

Resocialization refers to socialization experiences that represent a more radical change in the person. Resocialization contexts (e. g. , mental hospitals, some prisons, reform schools, therapy groups, political indoctrination camps. religious conversion settings) have as their explicit goal the transformation of the individual.

An important feature of resocialization is the replacement of one’s previous set of beliefs, values, and especially conceptions of the self with a new set grounded in the socializing group’s ideology or world view. This has been described as a process of death and rebirth of the self (Lifton 1963).

Typically, this is accomplished through intense small group interaction in which the physical and symbolic environments are highly controlled by the agents of socialization. It is an experience that usually involves considerable stress for the socializee. Socialization over the Life Course Socialization is a lifelong process of change.

Even though the socialization experienced in the family is in some ways the most consequential, individuals typically have important socializing experiences throughout their lives. A central theme in the lifecourse literature is the degree of continuity and consistency in personality as an

individual moves through the life course. Positions on this issue range from the claim that personality is shaped largely during early childhood (most evident in psychoanalytic theories) to the claim that people are thoroughly malleable, changing across situations and throughout their lives (characteristic of constructivist theories).

The majority appear to argue for an intermediate position, maintaining that the "core" personality or self-concept develops in early socialization experiences, while various other characteristics are added to self through the acquisition of new roles, identities, and socializing experiences (Brim 1966). For example, Clausen (1993) found that the development of "playful competence" during the childhood and early adolescent years affected the life course of adults many years later, resulting in individual histories of cumulative advantage or disadvantage.

The previous discussion suggests how contexts of socialization, which are typically age-graded, can contribute to the development of different aspects of individuals associated with different ages and stages of life. Some important socializing experiences and changes are keyed to developmental or maturational considerations: There are differences between the concerns and capabilities of children and those of adolescents, those of young adults and those of people in middle age, and those of the middle-aged and those of older persons.

Erikson's (1959) developmental scheme, building on the Freudian theory of psychosexual development but extending it beyond childhood, emphasizes the different developmental tasks associated with different stages of life. The

challenges or developmental tasks proposed by Erikson are a) trust versus mistrust, b) autonomy versus shame, c) initiative versus guilt, d) industry versus inferiority e) identity versus identity confusion, f) intimacy versus isolation, g) generativity versus selfabsorption, and ) integrity versus despair. Most of the socialization research guided by Erikson's formulations has focused on stage 5, adolescence, and the developmental task highlighting identity concerns. In modern society adolescence has long been considered a time when self-concept concerns increase in prominence. Physiological changes and changes in social circumstances (e. g. , high school, dating, career considerations) contribute to an increase in self-awareness and concern about how one is viewed by others.

Research by developmental psychologists generally has found that good family relations (those high in parental support, communication, involvement, and inductive control) facilitate the development of ego identity in adolescence (Gecas and Seff [1990] and Steinmetz 1999 provide reviews). By adolescence, however, the influence of parents is substantially less than it was during childhood. Increasingly, other agents and contexts of socialization become important to the adolescent: peers, school, friends, coaches, and so forth.

The adolescent's struggles with identity are worked out in a number of competing arenas. Identity concerns are not limited to adolescence, of course. If one considers socialization a lifelong process of self-concept formation, matters of identity are important at various stages of the individual's development. Identity concerns are most likely to be accentuated during periods of transition, particularly those involving

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entrance into or exit from social statuses and roles. Some of these role transitions are institutionalized and highly ritualized.

The rites of passage in various cultures marking the transition from childhood to adulthood can be elaborate and dramatic. Sometimes this involves acquiring a new name as well as a new status (as in many of the Plains Indian cultures). In contemporary Western societies, these status passages may be less dramatic but still quite consequential for the person: getting a driver's license, high school graduation, marriage, divorce, the first full-time job, retirement, widowhood. In general, each major transition initiates a new socializing experience or situation that has implications for the individual's self-concept.

Some theorists have focused on transitions in adulthood (Levinson 1978; Levinson and Crumpler 1996) and examined the circumstances that can lead to a "midlife crisis" an acute reexamination of the self. Evidence that such a crisis typically occurs at midlife is sparse. The adult years, especially in the later stages, are still relatively neglected by lifecourse scholars compared to studies of childhood and adolescence, but this may be changing. As longevity continues to increase in modern society, so will concern with socializing experiences in the later stages of life. We may be expanding some stages (e. . , postretirement and widowhood) as well as creating new ones, such as the "nursing home stage," as the life span increases. In considering socialization over the life course, it is necessary to take history and culture into account. Not just the content of socialization during various "stages" of life but also the stages themselves vary with the culture and the historical context. For example, adolescence as an identifiable stage of life is <https://assignbuster.com/sociology-and-socialization-assignment/>

a relatively recent historical construct in Western societies, closely associated with the extension of formal education to high school (Gecas and Seff 1990).

Even childhood, as Aries (1960) documents, is not universally considered a distinct stage of life. The modern conception of childhood as an identifiably distinct stage emerged during the European Renaissance, partly as a consequence of the emergence of parochial schools. More recently, Elder (1974) has shown a historical consciousness in his life-course analyses by examining how specific historical events (e. g. , the Great Depression; World War II) differentially affected two cohorts of children and their families.

Whether there are eight stages of life, four stages, or seven stages (as Shakespeare observed) depends on the society and one's analytic purposes.

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