

# Socialization

## Sections

1. The Importance of Socialization
2. Socialization and the Self
3. Agents of Socialization
4. Processes of Socialization

## Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you will be able to

- define the term *socialization*.
- discuss the role socialization plays in human development.
- describe the effects of extreme isolation on children.
- explain key concepts of socialization from the symbolic interactionist perspective.
- analyze the role of the family, school, peer group, and media in socializing young people.
- discuss processes for socialization in adulthood.



# Applying Sociology

Many of us assume that the love we feel for family and friends comes naturally. Actually, we learn these feelings from the people around us. In the photo at left, for example, the girls are learning how to share common feelings about the show they're watching.

When sociologists talk about learning how to express feelings, they use the word socialization. How have sociologists researched this process? One way is through cases of children who were isolated. Take the case of Genie. From the time she was nearly two, Genie's father kept her in a locked room. When she was discovered at the age of thirteen, much of her behavior was subhuman. Because Genie's father severely punished her for making any sounds, she never sobbed when she cried or spoke when angry. Because her father never gave her solid food, she could not chew. Her social behavior was primitive. If another person had something she liked, she would take it without asking.

Attempts to socialize Genie failed. After four years, she still could not read and spoke only in short phrases. In this chapter you will see how socialization occurs and dramatic examples of what happens when it does not.

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## Chapter Overview

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# The Importance of Socialization

## Key Term

- **socialization** (p. 110)

- **socialization**  
the process of learning to participate in a group

## Section Preview

Socialization is the cultural process of learning to participate in group life. Without it, we would not develop many of the characteristics we associate with being human. Studies have shown that animals and human infants who are deprived of intensive and prolonged social contact with others are stunted in their emotional and social growth.

## Socialization and Personality

Nearly all the human social behavior we consider natural and normal is learned. It is natural to us in the United States for husbands and wives to walk along side-by-side. In many places in India, however, it seems natural for wives to walk slightly behind their husbands. In fact, nearly all aspects of social life (including walking patterns) are not natural but learned through the process of socialization. Human beings at birth are helpless and without knowledge of their society's ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving. If a human infant is to participate in cultural life, much learning has to take place. **Socialization** is the cultural process of learning to participate in group life. Such learning takes place through cultural transmission.



Monkeys fail to develop psychologically and socially when deprived of their mothers. Can we generalize from monkeys to human children?



Orphanages, such as this one in Havana, Cuba, are of interest to sociologists. They worry what effect growing up without prolonged social contact with parents will have on children.

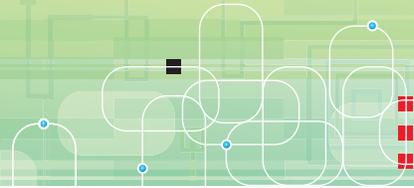
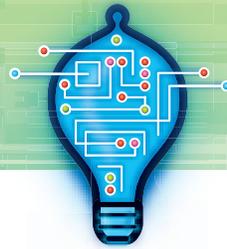
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Socialization begins at birth and continues throughout life. Successful socialization enables people to fit into all kinds of social groups. Socialization must occur if high school freshmen are to adjust to a new situation, if graduating seniors are to look for employment, and if presidents of the United States are to govern successfully.

The most important learning occurs early in life. Psychological case studies reveal that without prolonged and intensive social contact, children do not learn such basics as walking, talking, and loving. Without socialization, a human infant cannot develop the set of attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviors associated with being an individual.

**How do we know socialization is important?** Suppose you wanted to design an experiment to see how socialization affects infants. You would have to set up an experiment that compared a group of normally socialized infants (the *control* group) with a group of isolated infants—infants with little or no human contact (the *experimental* group). For obvious reasons, such experiments are not conducted with human infants. We do, however, have some nonexperimental evidence from studies of socially isolated children. Experiments have been done with monkeys.

**How do monkeys react to social isolation?** A psychologist, Harry Harlow, devised a famous experiment that showed the negative effects of social isolation on rhesus monkeys (Harlow and Zimmerman, 1959; Harlow and Harlow, 1962; Harlow, 1967). In one experiment, infant monkeys, separated from their mothers at birth, were exposed to two artificial mothers—wire dummies of the same approximate size and shape as real adult monkeys. One of the substitute mothers had an exposed wire body. The other was covered with soft terry cloth. Free to choose between them, the infant monkeys consistently spent more time with the soft, warm mother. Even when the exposed wire dummy became the only source of food, the terry cloth mother remained the favorite. Apparently, closeness and comfort were more important to these monkeys than food. When frightened by a mechanical toy bear or a rubber snake, these infant monkeys consistently ran to their cloth mothers for security and protection.



## Can the Internet Stunt Your Social Growth?

You will read in this section about the effects of extreme social isolation in Anna, Isabelle, and Genie. Although no one expects the results to be nearly as harmful, many sociologists today are concerned about how the increased use of computers and the Internet might affect young people. They wonder if this will be the first generation of children to grow up lacking adequate social skills.

Traditional games—sandlot ball games, for example—are socially oriented. These games require interaction and negotiation with other people, encourage sensitivity to others' viewpoints, help establish mutual understanding, and increase cooperative behavior (Casbergue and Kieff, 1998). These social skills are not developed by children who spend a great deal of time in isolated computer activities.

One researcher, Sherry Turkle, claims that the social isolation brought about by heavy use of the Internet leads to the destruction of meaningful social contact (Katz and Aspden, 1997). Similarly, Cliff Stoll (1995) says that excessive Internet activity lowers people's commitment to real friendships.

According to an important nationwide study, the Internet is promoting social isolation (Nie and Erbring, 2000). As people spend more time on the Internet, they experience less meaningful social contact. Impersonal electronic relationships are replacing face-to-face interaction with family and friends. According to the author of this study, political scientist Norman Nie, "When you spend time on the Internet, you don't hear a human voice and you never get a hug."

A more recent nationwide study (Nie et al., 2004) found that the average Internet user spends nearly three hours a day online. This translates into a daily reduction of one hour and ten minutes in face-to-face interaction with family. It also reduces sleep time each night by about 25 minutes.

Defenders of computers and the Internet point to a survey (based on 2,500 Americans) that showed Internet users were just as likely as non-Internet users to join religious, leisure, or community groups (Katz and Aspden, 1997). The survey results, according to these observers, indicate that Internet users are just as socially active as other people.

Critics of this survey point out that the researchers failed to ask some important questions. They did not distinguish between heavy users of the Internet and more moderate users. Also, those surveyed were adults who had already gone through the early years of socialization. There will have to be more research before we understand the effects of new technologies on children's social growth.

### Analyzing the Trends

What is your position in the debate about whether heavy Internet use stunts social skills? Give reasons for your answers.



Harlow showed that infant monkeys need intimacy, warmth, physical contact, and comfort. Infant monkeys raised in isolation became distressed, apathetic, withdrawn, hostile adult animals. They never exhibited normal sexual patterns. As mothers, they either rejected or ignored their babies. Sometimes, they even physically abused them.

### Can we generalize from monkeys to humans?

It is risky to assume that knowledge gained about non-humans also applies to humans. Nevertheless, many experts on human development believe that for human infants—as for Harlow’s monkeys—emotional needs for affection, intimacy, and warmth are as important as physiological needs for food, water, and protection. Human babies denied close contact usually have difficulty forming emotional ties with others. Touching, holding, stroking, and communicating appear to be essential to normal human development. According to a classic study by Lawrence Casler (1965), the developmental growth rate of institutionalized children—who receive less physical contact than normal—can be improved with only twenty minutes of extra touching a day.



## Case Studies on Isolated Children: Anna and Isabelle

To understand more about how socialization affects development, we will look at the case histories of two children—Anna and Isabelle—who were socially and emotionally abused. You already know the story of Genie from the Applying Sociology feature on page 109. Anna and Isabelle also had traumatic childhoods. Although these three children were born many years ago, similar situations still occur today, unfortunately.

**Who was Anna?** Anna was the second child born to her unmarried mother. At first, Anna’s strict grandfather had forced her mother to take Anna and leave home, but desperation drove them back again. Anna’s mother so feared that the sight of the child would anger her father that she kept Anna confined to a small room on the second floor of their farmhouse. For five years, Anna received only milk to drink. When finally found, she was barely alive. Her legs were skeleton-like and her stomach bloated from malnutrition. Apparently, Anna had seldom been moved from one position to another, and her clothes and bedding were filthy. She did not know what it was like to be held or comforted. At the time of her discovery, Anna could not walk or talk and showed few signs of intelligence.

During the first year and a half after being found, Anna lived in a county home for children. Here, she learned to walk, to understand simple commands, and to feed herself. She could recall people she had seen. But her speech was that of a one-year-old.

Anna was then transferred to a school for learning disabled children, where she made some further progress. Still, at the age of seven, her mental age was only nineteen months, and her social maturity was that of a two-year-old. A year later, she could bounce and catch a ball, participate as a follower in group activities, eat normally (although with a spoon only), attend to her

Studies have shown that children raised under extremely isolated conditions have little or no chance of ever being socialized.

toilet needs, and dress herself (except for handling buttons and snaps). At this point, she had acquired the speech level of a two-year-old. By the time of her death at age ten, she had made some additional progress. She could carry out instructions, identify a few colors, build with blocks, wash her hands, brush her teeth, and try to help other children. Her developing capacity for emotional attachment was reflected in the love she had developed for a doll.

**Who was Isabelle?** Nine months after Anna was found, Isabelle was discovered. She, too, had been hidden away because her mother was unmarried. Isabelle's mother had been deaf since the age of two and did not speak. She stayed with her child in a dark room, secluded from the rest of the family. When found at the age of six and a half, Isabelle was physically ill from an inadequate diet and lack of sunshine. Her legs were so bowed that when she stood the soles of her shoes rested against each other, and her walk was a skittering movement. Some of her actions were like those of a six-month-old infant. Unable to talk except for a strange croaking sound, Isabelle communicated with her mother by means of gestures. Like an animal in the wild, she reacted with fear and hostility to strangers, especially men.

At first, Isabelle was thought to be severely learning disabled. (Her initial IQ score was near the zero point.) Nevertheless, an intensive program of rehabilitation was begun. After a slow start, Isabelle progressed through the usual stages of learning and development at a faster pace than normal. It took her only two years to acquire the skills mastered by a normal six-year-old. By the time she was eight and a half, Isabelle was on an educational par with children her age. By outward appearances, she was an intelligent, happy, energetic child. At age fourteen, she participated in all the school activities normal for other children in her grade.

To Isabelle's good fortune, she, unlike Anna, benefited from intensive instruction at the hands of trained professionals. Her ability to progress may also have been because she was confined with her mother for company and comforting.

**What can we learn from these case studies?** The implication of the cases of Anna, Isabelle, and Genie is unmistakable. The personal and social development associated with being human is acquired through intensive and prolonged social contact with others.

## Section 1 Assessment

1. Define the term *socialization*.
2. What did Harlow's research on rhesus monkeys reveal?
3. Did the case studies on Anna, Isabelle, and Genie support Harlow's conclusions? Why or why not?

### Critical Thinking

4. **Analyzing Information** Do you think sociologists have over-emphasized the importance of social contact in learning? What are some legal and moral implications for the government in this kind of child abuse? Should the state protect children from their parents?

# Socialization and the Self

## Section Preview

All three theoretical perspectives agree that socialization is needed if cultural and societal values are to be learned. Symbolic interactionism offers the most fully developed perspective for studying socialization. In this approach, the self-concept is developed by using other people as mirrors for learning about ourselves.

## Key Terms

- self-concept (p. 116)
- looking-glass self (p. 116)
- significant others (p. 117)
- role taking (p. 118)
- imitation stage (p. 118)
- play stage (p. 118)
- game stage (p. 118)
- generalized other (p. 118)
- “me” (p. 119)
- “I” (p. 119)

## The Functionalist and Conflict Perspectives on Socialization

Each of the three major theoretical perspectives provides insights into socialization. However, the symbolic interactionist perspective allows a more complete understanding than the other two.

### How does the functionalist perspective explain socialization?

Functionalism stresses the ways in which groups work together to create a stable society. Schools and families, for example, socialize children by teaching the same basic norms, beliefs, and values. If it were otherwise, society could not exist as a whole. It would be fragmented and chaotic.

### How does the conflict perspective explain socialization?

The conflict perspective views socialization as a way of perpetuating the status quo. When people are socialized to accept their family’s social class, for example, they help preserve the current class system. People learn to accept



According to the conflict theory, these young boys are being socialized to accept their social class.

their social status before they have enough self-awareness to realize what is happening. Because they do not challenge their position in life, they do not upset the existing class structure. Consequently, socialization maintains the social, political, and economic advantages of the higher social classes.

## Symbolic Interactionism and Socialization

In the early part of the twentieth century, Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert Mead developed the symbolic interactionist perspective. They challenged the once widely held belief that human nature is biologically determined (that you are a certain way because you were born that way). For them, human nature is a product of society.



**How does symbolic interactionism help us understand socialization?** Symbolic interactionism uses a number of key concepts to explain socialization. These concepts include

- the self-concept
- the looking-glass self
- significant others
- role taking (the imitation stage, the play stage, the game stage)
- the generalized other.

**Where does the self-concept come from?** Charles Horton Cooley developed the idea of the **self-concept** from watching his own children at play. Your self-concept is your image of yourself as having an identity separate from other people.

Cooley (1902) realized that children interpreted how others reacted to them in many ways. For example, young children learn quickly that causing some disturbance when adult visitors are present turns attention from the guests to themselves. From such insights, children learn to judge themselves in terms of how they imagine others *will* react to them. Thus, other people serve as mirrors for the development of the self. Cooley called this way of learning the **looking-glass self**—a self-concept based on our idea of others' judgments of us.

**How does the looking-glass process work?** According to Cooley, we use other people as mirrors to reflect back what we imagine they think of us. In this view, the looking-glass self is the product of a three-stage process that is constantly taking place.

1. First, we imagine how we appear to others. (What is our perception of how others see us?)
2. Next, we imagine the reaction of others to our (imagined) appearance.
3. Finally, we evaluate ourselves according to how we imagine others have judged us.

This is not a conscious process, and the three stages can occur in very rapid succession. The result of the process is a positive or negative self-evaluation.

Consider this example of the looking-glass process. Suppose you have a new teacher you want to impress. You prepare hard for the next day's class.

- **self-concept**  
an image of yourself as having an identity separate from other people
- **looking-glass self**  
an image of yourself based on what you believe others think of you



**Figure 4.1 Socialization and Mass Media**

Each theoretical perspective has a unique view of the socialization process. This table identifies these views and illustrates the unique interpretation of each view with respect to the influence of the mass media on the socialization process.

Theoretical Perspective	View of Socialization	How the Media Influence Socialization
Functionalism	Stresses how socialization contributes to a stable society	Network television programs encourage social integration by exposing the entire society to shared beliefs, values, and norms.
Conflict Theory	Views socialization as a way for the powerful to keep things the same	Newspaper owners and editors exercise power by setting the political agenda for a community.
Symbolic Interactionism	Holds that socialization is the major determinant of human nature	Through words and pictures, children's books expose the young to the meaning of love, manners, and motherhood.

In class, as you are making a comment on the assignment, you have an image of your performance (stage 1). After finishing your comments, you think your teacher is disappointed (stage 2). Because you wanted your teacher to be impressed, you feel bad about yourself (stage 3).

**Can the looking glass be distorted?** Because the looking glass we use comes from our imaginations, it may be distorted. The mirror may not accurately reflect others' opinions of us. The teacher in the above example may not have been disappointed at all.

Unfortunately, the looking-glass process works even if we are mistaken about others' perceptions of us. If we incorrectly believe that a teacher, or a date, or our parents dislike us, the consequences to us are just as real as if it were true.

**Do we use some people as mirrors more than others?**

George Herbert Mead pointed out that some people are more important to us than others (Mead, 1934). The people whose judgments are most important to our self-concepts are called **significant others**. For a child, significant others are likely to include mother, father, grandparent, teachers, and playmates. Teenagers place heavy reliance on their peers. The variety of significant others is greater for adults, ranging from spouses, parents, and friends to ministers and employers.

- **significant others**  
those people whose reactions are most important to your self-concept

- **role taking**  
assuming the viewpoint of another person and using that viewpoint to shape the self-concept



**What is role taking?** As humans, we carry on silent conversations. That is, we think something to ourselves and respond internally to it. All of us do this when we predict the behavior of others. Through internal conversation, we can imagine the thoughts, emotions, and behavior of others in any social situation. **Role taking** allows us to see ourselves through the eyes of someone else. It allows us to take the viewpoint of another person and then respond to ourselves from that imagined viewpoint.

With role taking we can play out scenes in our minds and anticipate what others will say or do. For example, you might want to ask your teacher for an “A.” If you could not mentally put yourself in your teacher’s place, you would have no idea of the objections that she might raise. But by role-playing her reaction mentally, you can prepare for those objections and be ready to justify your “A.”

### **How does the ability for role taking develop?**

According to Mead, the ability for role taking is the product of a three-stage process. He called these the imitation stage, the play stage, and the game stage.

In the **imitation stage**, which begins at around one and a half to two years, the child imitates (without understanding) the physical and verbal behavior of a significant other. This is the first step in developing the capacity for role taking.

At the age of three or four, a young child can be seen playing at being mother, father, police officer, teacher, or astronaut. This play involves acting and thinking as a child imagines another person would. This is what Mead called the **play stage**—the stage during which children take on roles of others one at a time.

The third phase in the development of role taking Mead labeled the **game stage**. In this stage, children learn to engage in more sophisticated role taking as they become able to consider the roles of several people simultaneously. Games they play involve several participants, and there are specific rules designed to ensure that the behaviors of the participants fit together. All participants in a game must know what they are supposed to do and what is expected of others in the game. Imagine the confusion in a baseball game if young first-base players have not yet mastered the idea that the ball hit to a teammate will usually be thrown to them. In the second stage of role taking (the play stage) a child may pretend to be a first-base player one moment and pretend to be a base runner the next. In the game stage, however, first-base players who drop their gloves and run to second base when the other team hits the ball will not remain in the game for very long. It is during the game stage that children learn to gear their behavior to the norms of the group.

**When do we start acting out of principle?** During the game stage, a child’s self-concept, attitudes, beliefs, and values gradually come to depend less on individuals and more on general concepts. For example, being an honest person is no longer merely a matter of pleasing significant others such as one’s mother, father, or minister. Rather, it begins to seem wrong *in principle* to be dishonest. As this change takes place, a **generalized other**—an integrated conception of the norms, values, and beliefs of one’s community or society—emerges.

- **imitation stage**  
Mead’s first stage in the development of role taking; children begin to imitate behaviors without understanding why
- **play stage**  
Mead’s second stage in the development of role taking; children act in ways they imagine other people would
- **game stage**  
Mead’s third stage in the development of role taking; children anticipate the actions of others based on social rules
- **generalized other**  
integrated conception of the norms, values, and beliefs of one’s community or society

**What is the self?** According to Mead, we can think of the self as being composed of two parts: the “me” and the “I.” The “me” is the part of the self created through socialization. The “me” accounts for predictability and conformity. Yet much human behavior is spontaneous and unpredictable. An angry child may, for example, unexpectedly yell hurtful words at the parent whom he loves. To account for this spontaneous, unpredictable, often creative part of the self, Mead proposed the “I.”

The “I” does not operate only in extreme situations of rage or excitement. It interacts constantly with the “me” as we conduct ourselves in social situations. According to Mead, the first

reaction of the self comes from the “I.” Before we act, however, this reaction is directed into socially acceptable channels by the socialized “me.” When the “I” wants a piece of a friend’s candy bar, the “me” reflects on the consequences of taking the candy without permission. Thus, the “I” normally takes the “me” into account before acting. However, the unpredictability of much human behavior demonstrates that the “me” is not always in control!



What do you think is the developmental level of the “generalized other” in each of these two shoppers?

- “me”  
the part of the self formed through socialization
  
- “I”  
the part of the self that accounts for unlearned, spontaneous acts

## Section 2 Assessment

1. What is the looking-glass self?
2. What are the consequences of having a distorted looking glass?
3. Which “self” is the first to react to a situation, the “me” or the “I”?

### Critical Thinking

4. **Applying Concepts** Describe an experience you have had with the looking-glass process. How did this experience touch or change your self-concept?

# Another Time



## Surviving a Prisoner-of-War Camp

*By learning the culture around them—whatever that culture is—human beings can and do adapt to almost any situation. This learning process is a type of socialization. The following description of adaptation in a German prison camp during World War II was written by Bruno Bettelheim, a noted American scholar who survived imprisonment.*

When a prisoner had reached the final stage of adjustment to the camp situation, he had changed his personality so as to accept various values of the SS [Hitler's elite troops] as his own. A few examples may illustrate how this acceptance expressed itself.

Slowly prisoners accepted, as the expression of their verbal aggressions, terms which definitely did not originate in their previous vocabularies, but were taken over from the very different vocabulary of the SS. From copying the verbal aggressions of the SS to copying its form of bodily aggressions was one more step, but it took several years to make this step. It was not unusual to find old prisoners, when in charge of others, behaving worse than the SS.

Old prisoners who identified themselves with the SS did so not only in respect to aggressive behavior. They would try to acquire old pieces of SS uniforms. If that was not possible, they tried to sew and mend

their uniforms so that they would resemble those of the guards. The length to which prisoners would go in these efforts seemed unbelievable, particularly since the SS punished them for their efforts to

copy SS uniforms. When asked why they did it, the old prisoners admitted that they loved to look like the guards.

The old prisoners' identification with the SS did not stop with the copying of their outer appearance and behavior. Old prisoners accepted Nazi goals and values, too, even when these seemed opposed to their own interests. It was appalling to see how far even politically well-educated prisoners would go with this identification. At one time American and English newspapers were full of stories about the cruelties committed in these camps. The SS punished prisoners for the appearance of these stories, true to its policy of punishing the group for whatever a member or a former member did, since the stories must have originated in reports from former prisoners. In discussions of this event, old prisoners would insist that it was not the business of foreign correspondents or newspapers to bother with German institutions, expressing their hatred of the journalists who tried to help them.

After so much has been said about the old prisoners' tendency to conform and to identify with the SS, it ought to be stressed that this was only part of the picture. The author has tried to concentrate on interesting psychological mechanisms in group behavior rather than on reporting types of behavior which are either well known or could reasonably be expected. These same old prisoners who identified with the SS defied it at other moments, demonstrating extraordinary courage in doing so.

**Source:** From *Surviving and Other Essays*, by Bruno Bettelheim. © 1979 by Bruno Bettelheim and Trude Bettelheim as Trustees.

## Thinking It Over

1. Describe an experience you have had in which you or someone you know, as a new member of a group, imitated the ways of the group.
2. How does gang affiliation (such as wearing gang colors or using their slogans) demonstrate the tendency to conform?



# Agents of Socialization

## Section Preview

During childhood and adolescence, the major agents of socialization are the family, school, peer group, and mass media. The family's role is critical in forming basic values. Schools introduce children to life beyond the family. In peer groups, young people learn to relate as equals. The mass media provide role models for full integration into society.

## Key Terms

- hidden curriculum (p. 122)
- peer group (p. 123)
- mass media (p. 124)

## The Family and Socialization

The child's first exposure to the world occurs within the family, which is the primary agent of socialization. Some essential developments occur through close interaction with a small number of people—none of whom the child has selected. Within the family the child learns to

- think and speak
- internalize norms, beliefs, and values
- form some basic attitudes
- develop a capacity for intimate and personal relationships
- acquire a self-image (Handel, 1990).

The impact of the family reaches far beyond its direct effects on the child. Our family's social class shapes what we think of ourselves and how others treat us, even far into adulthood. Author Jean Evans offers an illustration of this in the case of Johnny Rocco, a twenty-year-old living in a city slum.

Johnny hadn't been running the streets long when the knowledge was borne in on him that being a Rocco made him "something special"; the reputation of the notorious Roccas, known to neighbors, schools, police, and welfare agencies as "chisellers, thieves, and trouble-makers," preceded him. The cop on the beat, Johnny says, always had some cynical smart crack to make. . . . Certain children were not permitted to play with him. Wherever he went—on the streets, in the neighborhood, settlement house, at the welfare agency's penny milk station, at school, where other Roccas had been before him—he recognized himself by a gesture, an oblique remark, a wrong laugh. (Evans, 1954:11)



The infant in the photo on the left is likely to be socialized in a very different way from the two children above. What are some differences in attitudes that will probably be formed by these children because of their different family life?



Parents are no longer the only significant socializing force in their children's lives, as the cartoon suggests.

## Socialization in Schools

In school, children are under the care and supervision of adults who are not relatives. For the first time, many of the child's relationships with other people are impersonal. Rewards and punishments are based on performance rather than affection. Although a mother may cherish any picture that her child creates, a teacher evaluates her students by more objective standards. Slowly, children are taught to be less dependent emotionally on their parents. The school also creates feelings of loyalty and allegiance to something beyond the family.

**How do schools socialize students?** The socialization process in school involves more than reading, writing, and arithmetic. Underlying the formal goals of the school is the **hidden curriculum**—the informal and unofficial aspects of culture that children are taught in preparation for life. The hidden curriculum teaches children discipline, order, cooperation, and conformity—characteristics required for success in the adult world of work. (You will learn more about the hidden curriculum in Chapter 12.)

School also teaches children how we experience time in the real world. According to education critic John Holt (1995), life in schools is run by the clock, as it is in the working world. A bell signals when children must move to the next scheduled event, whether or not they understand what they have been working on and whether or not they are ready to switch to a different subject. Getting through a preset number of activities within a given time period often becomes more important than learning.

- **hidden curriculum**  
the informal and unofficial aspects of culture that children are taught in school

Schools have rules and regulations to cover almost all activities—how to dress, how to wear one’s hair, which side of the hall to walk on, when to speak in class. Teachers reward children with praise and acceptance when they recite the “right” answers, behave “properly,” or exhibit “desirable” attitudes.

Children are isolated from the working adult society by being set apart in school for most of their preadult lives. Because they are separated from the adult world for such a long time, young people must depend on one another for much of their social life.

- **peer group**  
set of individuals of roughly the same age and interests

## Peer Group Socialization

The family and the school are both agencies of socialization organized and operated by adults. The child’s **peer group**—composed of individuals of roughly the same age and interests—is the only agency of socialization that is not controlled primarily by adults. Children usually belong to several peer groups. A child may belong to a play group in the neighborhood, a clique at school, an after-school club, or a sports team.

**How do peer groups contribute to socialization?** In the family and at school, children are subordinated to adults. In the peer group, young people have an opportunity to engage in give-and-take relationships. Children experience conflict, competition, and cooperation in such groups. The peer group also gives children experience in self-direction. They can begin to make their own decisions; experiment with new ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving; and engage in activities that involve self-expression.



Socialization is occurring in each of the peer groups pictured here, perhaps with far different consequences for the larger society.



The mass media are a relatively new source of socialization.

How does television advertising influence the dating behavior of teenagers?

- **mass media**  
means of communication designed to reach the general population

Independence from adults is also promoted by the peer group, because often the norms of the peer group conflict with those of the adult world. Children learn to be different from their parents in ways that help to develop self-sufficiency.

The peer group also provides an opportunity for children to develop close ties with friends outside the family, including members of the opposite sex. At the same time, they are learning to get along with large numbers of people, many of whom are quite different from themselves. This helps develop the social flexibility needed in a mobile, rapidly changing society.

**Do friends or family have more influence on young people?** The majority of Americans now live in either urban or suburban areas. In both two-income families and single-parent families, parents may commute many miles to work and spend much of their time away from home. Consequently, once children reach the upper levels of grade school, they may spend more time with their peers than they do with their parents.

According to psychologist Judith Harris (1998), peers are more important than parents in socializing children. Even though most sociologists do not agree with this extreme conclusion, many do believe that the peer group is having a growing effect on social development.

## The Mass Media and Socialization

**Mass media** are means of communication designed to reach the general population. They include such things as television, radio, newspapers, magazines, movies, books, the Internet, tapes, and discs. Many popular images presented in the mass media are highly distorted. For example, detective and police work are not as exciting and glamorous as depicted in books, in movies, and on television. Nevertheless, it is often through the mass media that children are first introduced to numerous aspects of their culture (Fishman and Cavender, 1998).

### What role do the mass media play in socialization?

The mass media display role models for children to imitate. Learning these role models helps to integrate the young into society.

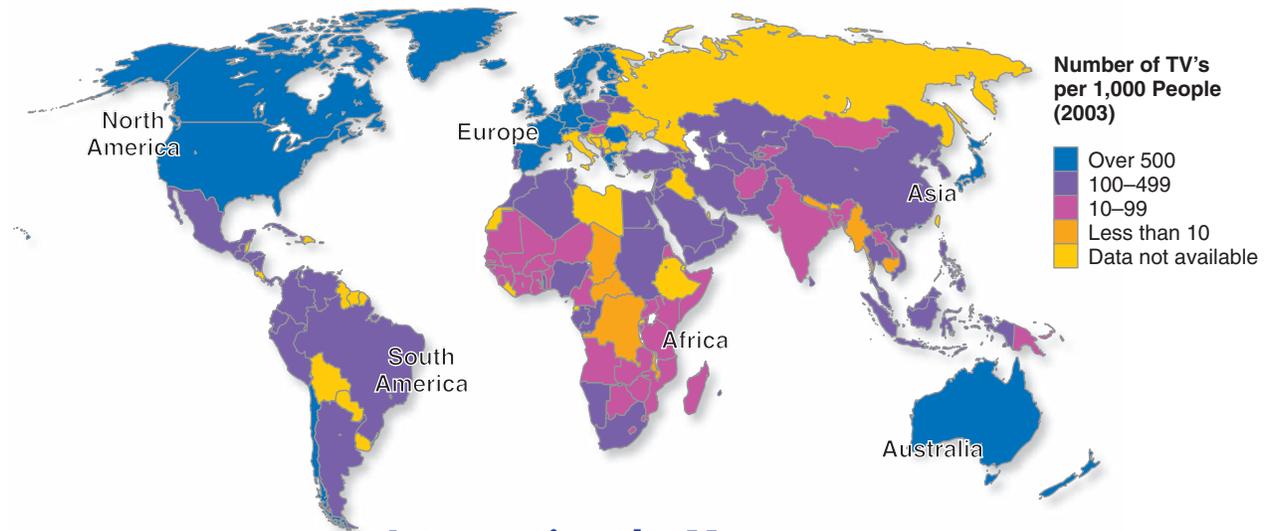
*The mass media, by their content alone, teach many of the ways of the society. This is evident in the behavior we take for granted—the duties of the detective, waitress, or sheriff; the functions of the hospital, advertising agency, and police court; behavior in hotel, airplane, or cruise ship; the language of the prison, army, or courtroom; the relationship between nurses and doctors or secretaries and their bosses. Such settings and relationships are portrayed time and again in films, television shows, and comic strips; and all “teach”—however misleadingly—norms, status positions, and institutional functions (Elkin and Handel, 1991:189).*

# World View



## Availability of Television

The mass media play a key role in the socialization process. Since nearly every U.S. home has at least one television (the majority have more), this medium is one of the most influential in the United States. This map shows that ownership of televisions varies widely around the world.



### Interpreting the Map

1. What geographical factor(s) might contribute to the density of TV households in South America?
2. Do you think the attitudes of members of societies with more televisions are influenced more by government advertising than members of societies with fewer televisions? Why or why not?

**Source:** The World Bank, 2005  
*World Development Indicators.*

The mass media also offer children ideas about the values in their society. They provide children with images of achievement and success, activity and work, equality and democracy.

**What about violence in the mass media?** On the negative side, consider the relationship between violence on television and real-life violence. By age sixteen, the average American child will have seen twenty thousand homicides on television (Leonard, 1998). Social scientists have been reluctant in the past to recognize a causal connection between television violence and real-life violence. However, based on hundreds of studies involving over ten thousand children, most now conclude that watching aggressive behavior on television significantly increases aggression in society (Dudley, 1999; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001; Donnerstein, 2004).

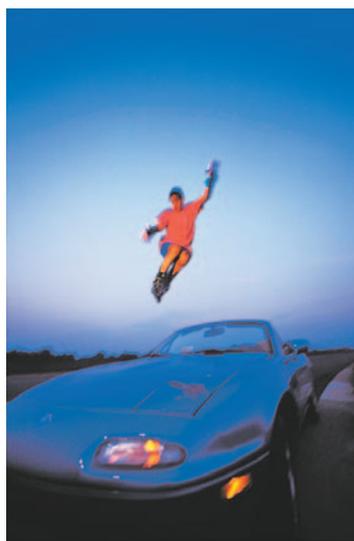


#### Student Web Activity

Visit the *Sociology and You* Web site at [glencoe.com](http://glencoe.com) and click on **Chapter 4—Student Web Activities** for an activity on mass media and socialization.

# Sociology Today

## Struggling Through the Teen Years



Adolescents do not get good press. They are often portrayed by the media as awkward, unreasonable, strong-willed, and overconfident. Some parents, taking their cue from comedian Bill Cosby, jokingly attribute teen behavior to temporary “brain damage.” Researcher David Elkind (1981) offers another explanation for much troublesome adolescent behavior. Teens’ problem, he concludes, is not brain damage. They are simply struggling through the emotional and physiological changes of the teen years as best they can.

Teenagers may appear to behave irrationally (by adult standards) because of new thinking capabilities not yet under their control. Contrary to the long-accepted belief that the human brain is fully developed by the age of 8 or 12, startling new research reveals that the brain remains a construction site even into the 20s (Begley, 2000). And the part of the brain that undergoes the greatest change between puberty and young adulthood is responsible for such activities as judgment, emotional control, and organization and planning.

Whereas adults are accustomed to looking at situations from several different viewpoints, teens are not. Confusion can result when inexperienced young people attempt to move from making simple, one-factor decisions to consideration of several factors simultaneously. For example, a teen who wants to join friends in a ride from a night football game may consider that the driver has a license, but may fail to consider the driver’s experience, driving habits, or drinking behavior.

Teens assume that other people have as much interest in them as they have in themselves. Consequently, they surround themselves with an “imaginary audience.” Since teenagers believe that everyone is watching

Consider a few examples. A two-year-old girl died when her older brother, age five, set the house on fire with matches while imitating behavior he had seen on the cartoon program *Beavis and Butt-Head*. Just on the basis of televised reports of violence, a rash of would-be copycat crimes followed the shooting massacre of thirteen students and one teacher at Columbine High School by two students who then shot themselves. Television’s effects, of course, are usually more hidden, subtle, and long term:

*. . . [N]ot every child who watched a lot of violence or plays a lot of violent games will grow up to be violent. Other forces must converge, as they did [at Columbine]. . . . But just as every cigarette increases the chance that someday you will get lung cancer, every exposure to violence increases the chances that some day a child will behave more violently than they would otherwise (To Establish Justice, 1999:vi).*



and evaluating them, they are extremely self-conscious. In groups, adolescents often play to this imaginary audience by engaging in loud and provocative behavior. Yet they fail to understand why adults become annoyed with them. Gradually, they begin to realize that others have their own preoccupations, and the imaginary-audience behavior lessens.

Teenagers frequently have the feeling of invulnerability. For example, they may think that drug addiction, cancer from smoking, pregnancy, and death happen only to others. Their reckless behavior must be seen within this context.

Young people tend to assume that fairly common adolescent experiences are unique. Common complaints include “Mom, you just don’t know how much it hurt for Carlos to take out Maria,” and “Dad, you don’t know what it’s like not to have my own bike.” At the other extreme, adolescents may feel that their own perceptions are shared by everyone. A young boy, for example, may believe that others find him unattractive because of what he thinks is a large nose. No amount of talking can convince him that he is exaggerating the size of his nose or that others pay little attention to it. This self-centered view of reality begins to decrease as teens discover that others are having similar feelings and experiences.

### Doing Sociology

Identify three ways in which adults and adolescents could use this developmental awareness to ease the struggle of the teen years.

## Section 3 Assessment

1. Why does the family have such strong influence on a child’s socialization?
2. What aspect of socialization does the child first encounter in school that he or she does not meet in the family?
3. What is the hidden curriculum?
4. Besides family and school, identify two other socializing agents.

### Critical Thinking

5. **Evaluating Information** Some psychologists believe that peer groups have more influence on later socialization than the family group. Give reasons why you agree or disagree with that premise.

# Processes of Socialization

## Key Terms

- **total institutions** (p. 128)
- **desocialization** (p. 128)
- **resocialization** (p. 128)
- **anticipatory socialization** (p. 129)
- **reference group** (p. 132)

- **total institutions**  
places in which people are separated from the rest of society and controlled by officials in charge

- **desocialization**  
the process of giving up old norms, values, attitudes, and behaviors

- **resocialization**  
the process of adopting new norms, values, attitudes, and behaviors

## Section Preview

Symbolic interactionism views socialization as a lifelong process. Desocialization is the process of having to give up old norms. Resocialization begins as people adopt new norms and values. Anticipatory socialization and reference groups are concerned with voluntary change as when moving from one life stage to another.

## Desocialization and Resocialization

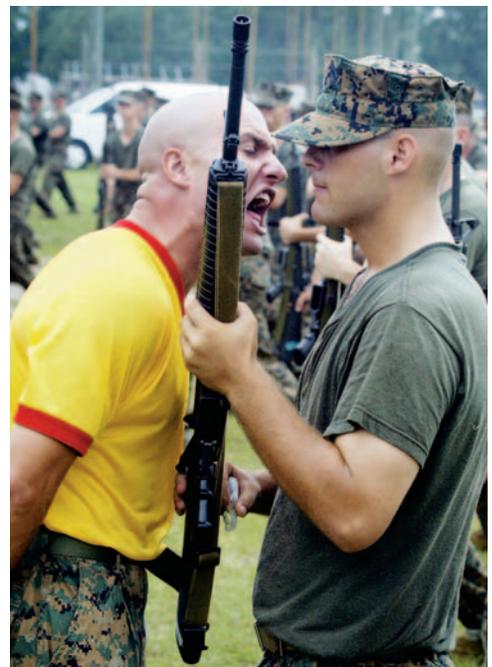
Whenever change occurs over the course of your life, you will learn new behaviors and skills. This learning is important to socialization. Symbolic interactionism describes four processes associated with socialization after childhood: *desocialization*, *resocialization*, *anticipatory socialization*, and *reference groups*.

**How does desocialization prepare people for new learning?** Mental hospitals, cults, and prisons are **total institutions**—places where residents are separated from the rest of society. These residents are not free to manage their own lives, but are controlled and manipulated by those in charge. The end purpose of this control and manipulation is to permanently change the residents. The first step is **desocialization**—the process by which people give up old norms, values, attitudes, and behaviors. For those in total institutions, desocialization often means the destruction of old self-concepts of personal identity.

Desocialization in institutions is accomplished in many ways. Replacing personal possessions with standard-issue items promotes sameness among the residents. It deprives them of the personal items (long hair, hair brushes, ball caps) they have used to present themselves as unique individuals. The use of serial numbers to identify people and the loss of privacy also contribute to the breakdown of past identity. Cult members, for example, may be denied use of their given names.

**How does resocialization begin?** Once the self-concept has been broken down, **resocialization**—the process in which people adopt new norms, values, attitudes, and behaviors—can begin. Those in

The military, a total institution, resocializes soldiers by first forcing them to give up many aspects of their individuality.

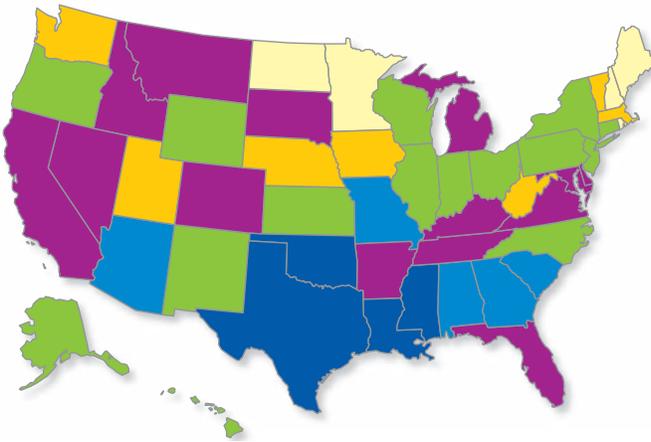
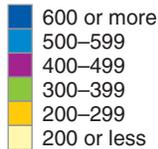


# Snapshot of America

## Rates of Imprisonment

The U.S. has one of the highest rates of imprisonment in the industrialized world—over four times that of any Western European country. Justice officials worry that some prisons function as “schools for crime.” If prisons do first desocialize and then resocialize inmates toward a criminal identity, then the U.S. prison system is unintentionally increasing the criminal portion of the population. This map shows the number of prisoners with sentences of more than one year per 100,000 U.S. residents.

### Rates of Imprisonment



### Interpreting the Map

1. Where does your state rank in terms of imprisonment rate? Can you relate the extent of imprisonment in your state to the nature of the socialization that occurs in your state?
2. Do the states adjoining your state have imprisonment rates that are similar or dissimilar to your state?

Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2005.

control of total institutions, using an elaborate system of rewards and punishments, attempt to give residents new self-concepts. Rewards for taking on a new “identity” can include extra food, special responsibilities, or periods of privacy. Punishments for nonconformity involve shaming, loss of special privileges, physical punishment, and physical isolation.

The concepts of desocialization and resocialization were developed to analyze social processes in extreme situations. They still apply to other social settings, including basic training in the U.S. Marine Corps and plebe (freshman) year at the United States Military Academy. In much less extreme form, these concepts illuminate changes in our normal life course. Desocialization and resocialization occur as a child becomes a teenager, when young adults begin careers, and as the elderly move into retirement or widowhood.

## Anticipatory Socialization

**Anticipatory socialization** is the process of preparing (in advance) for new norms, values, attitudes, and behaviors. It does not generally occur in prisons or mental hospitals because it involves *voluntary change*.

- **anticipatory socialization** the voluntary process of preparing to accept new norms, values, attitudes, and behaviors

# Focus on Research



## Case Study: High School Reunions

Socialization occurs throughout life. Even high school reunions play a part. If you asked most Americans to talk about their experiences at a recent high school reunion, what would they say?

"It was great seeing old friends."

"I was curious about how things turned out for people I loved and hated as a teenager."

"I plan to get together with some old friends in the near future."

High school reunions are generally thought to be a time to recapture fond memories of youth.

One researcher wished to investigate the meaning of high school reunions. Keiko Ikeda (1998) studied eight reunions in the American Midwest. He observed these reunions armed with a camera, a tape recorder, and a notebook. After each reunion, he also conducted in-depth, life-story interviews with samples of participants.

Ikeda's results are too complex and varied to easily summarize. (This is typical of in-depth observational studies.) One aspect of the study, however, reveals the socializing aspect of high school reunions. Ikeda compared several reunions of one high school—tenth, fifteenth, twentieth, thirtieth, fortieth, and fiftieth. He focused on the relative emphasis on the past and the present. As you can see from the passage below, the past becomes more important as age increases.

*In the earlier reunions (the tenth and fifteenth years), a concern with relative status and a sense of competitiveness is expressed, often blatantly, through award-giving ceremonies. . . . The hall was decorated in the school colors, and images of the high school mascot were present, but beyond this no high school memorabilia were displayed. The music, too, was current, and not the rock 'n' roll of the late sixties and early seventies.*

*The twentieth-year reunion of the Class of '62 is typical of a transitional phase in which elements from the past begin to assume an important role. The past is expressed in high school memorabilia . . . in . . . films and slides taken during high school, and in . . . high school anecdotes that are playfully interwoven throughout the ceremonial events.*

*In the thirtieth-year reunion of the Class of '52, the past firmly occupied center stage. A carefully crafted, chronological narrative of the senior year, entitled "The Way We Were," was read, in which major class activities were recalled month by month. . . .*



**Cathy**, © 1990, Cathy Guisewite, Universal Press Syndicate. (Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.)

*In the fiftieth-year reunion, we find a dramatic disappearance of all ritual activities. According to the president of the Class of '32, his class had held reunions every ten years since graduation, and in earlier ceremonies they had given awards, but this time, "none of the folks in the reunion committee felt like doing that kind of thing." It seemed that attendees at the fiftieth-year reunion, for the most part, had risen above concerns of past and present and were content to celebrate together the simple fact that they all still had the vigor to attend a reunion.*

**Source:** Keiko Ikeda, *A Room Full of Mirrors*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998, pp. 143–145.

## Working with the Research

1. Ask an adult to describe the activities at one or more high school reunions that he or she has attended. Compare the description with Ikeda's findings.
2. Suppose you had a class assignment to study an upcoming reunion at your school. Select a research question you would want to ask. Identify the research methods you would use.



The dress on these young people indicates they are preparing for entry into the adult world of work or higher education. How does a peer group act as a tool for anticipatory socialization?

- **reference group**  
group whose norms and values are used to guide behavior;  
group with whom you identify

Seniors in college, normally seen on campus only in jeans and oversized sweatshirts, suddenly, as graduation nears, are wearing tailored suits and much more serious expressions. In preparing for entry into the business world, they are talking with friends who have graduated as well as company recruiters. In effect, they are preparing themselves for the resocialization they know awaits them (Atchley, 2003).

Anticipatory socialization may occur in people who are moving from one stage in their lives to another. Consider teenagers, for example. Because they want to resemble those their own age, they may willingly abandon many of the norms, values, attitudes, and behaviors learned previously. This process generally begins in the preteen years. Preteens begin early to observe the ways of teenagers. Teens become their new **reference group**—the group they use to evaluate themselves and from which they acquire attitudes, values, beliefs, and norms. In this situation, the new reference group is a tool for anticipatory socialization.

## Section 4 Assessment

1. Identify the following actions as desocialization (D), resocialization (R), or anticipatory socialization (A).
  - a. First-year students acquire a new identity during their freshman year at a military academy.
  - b. Prison personnel deliberately attempt to destroy the self-concepts of inmates.
  - c. High school students identify with college students.
2. Which of the following is *not* an example of a reference group?
  - a. Rock-star subculture
  - b. United States Military Academy
  - c. Terrorists
  - d. Mass media

### Critical Thinking

3. **Applying Concepts** Which group do you feel is the most influential in the present stage of your socialization—family, peers, school, or the media? Why?

## Summary

### Section 1: The Importance of Socialization

**Main Idea:** Socialization is the cultural process of learning to participate in groups. Studies have shown that animals and human infants who are deprived of intensive and prolonged social contact are stunted in their emotional and social growth.

### Section 2: Socialization and the Self

**Main Idea:** Symbolic interactionism offers the most fully developed perspective for studying socialization. In this approach, the self-concept is developed by using other people as mirrors for learning about ourselves.

### Section 3: Agents of Socialization

**Main Idea:** During childhood and adolescence, the major agents of socialization are the family, school, peer group, and mass media.

### Section 4: Processes of Socialization

**Main Idea:** Symbolic interactionism views socialization as a lifelong process. Desocialization is the process of having to give up old norms. Resocialization begins as people adopt new norms and values. Anticipatory socialization and reference groups are concerned with voluntary change as when moving from one life stage to another.



#### Self-Check Quiz

Visit the *Sociology and You* Web site at [glencoe.com](http://glencoe.com) and click on **Chapter 4—Self-Check Quizzes** to prepare for the chapter test.

## Reviewing Vocabulary

Complete each sentence using each term once.

- |                               |                       |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| a. socialization              | e. role taking        |
| b. personality                | f. generalized other  |
| c. anticipatory socialization | g. total institutions |
| d. looking-glass self         | h. resocialization    |

- \_\_\_\_\_ is the attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviors associated with an individual.
- The cultural process of learning to participate in group life is called \_\_\_\_\_.
- \_\_\_\_\_ allows us to assume the viewpoint of another person and use that viewpoint to shape our self-concept.
- \_\_\_\_\_ are places in which people are separated from the rest of society and controlled by officials in charge.
- The process of adopting new norms, values, attitudes, and behaviors is known as \_\_\_\_\_.
- An image of yourself based on what you believe others think of you is called \_\_\_\_\_.
- \_\_\_\_\_ is the voluntary process of preparing to accept new norms, values, attitudes, and behaviors.
- The integrated conception of the norms, values, and beliefs of one's society is called the \_\_\_\_\_.

## Reviewing the Facts

- What does the study involving rhesus monkeys suggest about the choices that human infants would make in the same situation?
- What is socialization from the viewpoint of symbolic interactionism?
- Which agent of socialization has been the most powerful force in your life? Explain.
- What concept discussed in this chapter relates to the song lyric: "Walk a Mile in My Shoes"?

13. What is a distinguishing characteristic of total institutions?
14. How does resocialization differ from anticipatory socialization?

## Thinking Critically

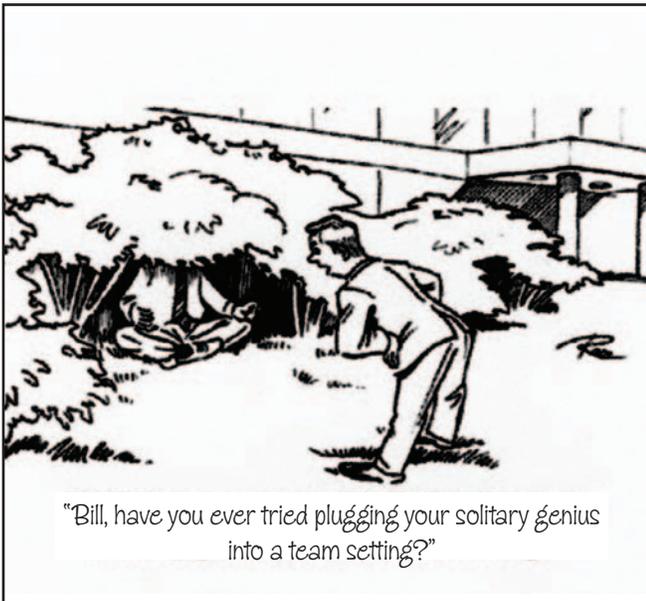
### 15. Making Predictions

A growing concern about computers is that some people and groups of people are being “left behind” because they don’t have equal access to technology. How might this become a problem for your generation?

### 16. Analyzing Visuals

Look at the cartoon below and review what you have read in Section 1 and Section 2 of the chapter.

- How do you think a sociologist would diagnose the problem of the man in the shrubbery?
- What does the cartoon imply about bureaucratic workplaces and their ability to utilize them?



www.cartoonstock.com

### 17. Evaluating Information

This chapter discusses the socializing influences of mass media. Our perceptions of the ideal body types seem to be largely a product of media socialization. In a later chapter, you will have an opportunity to look at how the media idealizes body types. Girls feel the need to be thin and boys tend to measure how muscular they are. Discuss how television, magazines, CDs, and video games reinforce these images. Give examples from your experience of how the media has socialized Americans to admire certain figure and body types.

### 18. Analyzing Information

Your daily life includes many social networks, or groups that regularly contribute to your socialization. They include family, friends, teachers, people at work, teammates, and so forth. Identify one of these groups, and imagine your day if you suddenly lost contact with those people. What support would you be missing? What key elements are provided by this particular social network?

### 19. Interpreting Information

Sociologists claim the average American watches television seven hours a day, yet some students say they never watch TV. How could you account for this fact? Remember to refer to what you learned from the chapter in discussing this question.

### 20. Making Generalizations

Total institutions, such as prisons, presume that desocialization and resocialization occur, since one of their goals is to make prisoners law abiding. Yet more than half of the inmates released in the United States return to prison. If desocialization and resocialization really do take place, why is the recidivism rate (the number of prisoners who return to prison) so high? Propose a theory for what might be happening, using the concept of resocialization.

## Sociology Projects

### 21. Socialization and the Media

In this chapter, you read that television plays a key role in the socialization process. Television presents powerful role models to children, even though parents and other adults play an important role interpreting what young viewers see. Based on the table below, frame a hypothesis to test the relationship between socialization and the increase in TV and cable viewing options.

Characteristics of TV/VCR Ownership in U.S. Households (As percentage of TV households)					
	1975	1985	1995	2000	2003
Multi-set	43	57	71	76	79
Color	74	91	99	99	99
VCR	—	14	79	86	95
Remote Control	—	29	91	95	95
Cable and/or satellite	—	26	28	32	85*

\* 2003 is the first year for which satellite information was given.  
Source: *Time Almanac*, 2006.

### 22. TV and Real Life

This activity asks you to assess how “real” TV is compared with what we see and do every day. You are to watch two hours of TV. Watch shows that fictionally portray real life (sporting events, the news, and documentaries are not appropriate for this activity). Take detailed notes on the characters, body types, occupations, social class, race, ethnic group, and age. Then venture out into the real world, to a public place such as a park, laundromat, mall, or airport, and observe for two hours. Concentrate on several people, and note the same features that you did for the TV characters. Write a paragraph comparing the characters on television with those you observed in real life.

### 23. Major Agents of Socialization

Some children without parents or close family find themselves being moved from one foster home to another for the greater part of their childhood. Write an essay of at least one page in length, using standard grammar, proper spelling, and good sentence structure, in which you examine the role of each major agent of socialization in the development of an individual growing up in this environment.

**HINT:** Family is a major agent of socialization. Family exists in the traditional sense and in variations of all kinds.

## Technology Activities

24. As indicated in this chapter, the process of socialization occurs throughout a person’s life. The Internet has assumed a significant role in the socialization of Americans. It actually aids television in the process.
1. What are the most popular television shows among your friends?
  2. Use a search engine to see if these shows have a Web site and what kind of information they present.
  3. What benefits do the Web sites provide to the viewers? To the television show?
25. Using the Internet and your school or local library, research the role the following technological inventions of their time played in the socialization of Americans: the popularity of the radio during 1940–1950; the growing popularity of color television from 1960 to the present; and the popularity of the Internet over the last five years. Consider the positive and negative effects, analyzing how norms and behaviors were changed by the available programming and/or advertising.

# Enrichment Reading



## National Television Violence

### Key Findings

Today, violence is not only seen on the streets but also in the schools. During the last five years of the twentieth century, there were over 120 people shot in schools. We now hear stories in the news about young people participating in violent shootings on school grounds and killing innocent bystanders. In a Michigan school in 2000, one six-year-old shot and killed a classmate at school. These violent acts raise questions: Why is there an increase in violence, especially among today's youth? Does television have a negative effect on individuals? Does television encourage violent behaviors?

In 1994, the National Television Violence Study initiated the first part of its three-year project to assess violence on television. This study, which is the largest study of media content ever undertaken, was funded by the National Cable Television Association. The project examined approximately 2,500 hours of television programming that included 2,693 programs.

The first of the three studies analyzes violent content in television programming. The second study examines children's reactions to ratings and viewer advisories. The final study analyzes the content of antiviolence public service announcements (PSAs).

Following is a summary of the first study conducted in 1994–1995. Collectively, these findings establish the norms that exist in the overall television environment. Many of the patterns observed cause some concern.

### Overall Conclusions about Violence on Television

- **predominate**  
to exert control over; to hold an advantage in numbers
- **desensitization**  
the process of preventing an emotional response; make less sensitive
- **perpetrator**  
someone who carries out or brings about an action; in law, one who commits a crime

- **Violence predominates on television, often including large numbers of violent interactions per program.**

The majority (57 percent) of programs on television contain violence, and roughly one third of violent programs contain nine or more violent interactions. The frequency of violence on television can contribute to **desensitization** and fear, as well as provide ample opportunities to learn violent attitudes and behaviors.

- **In the majority of the episodes of violence, the perpetrator engages in repeated violent acts.**

The perpetrator engages in repeated acts of violence in more than half (58 percent) of all violent interactions. This increases the amount of violence to which viewers are exposed.



On a daily basis, children are exposed to countless episodes of violence on their televisions.

- **contextual**  
meaning that is derived from the setting or the environment; not stated, but implied
- **trivialize**  
to make something less important or serious than it is

- **In one-quarter of the violent interactions, a gun is used.**

Certain visual cues, such as weapons, tend to activate aggressive thoughts in viewers. Later, these thoughts cause individuals to interpret neutral events as possibly threatening or aggressive.

- **In about three-quarters of all violent scenes, perpetrators go unpunished.**

The portrayal of rewards and punishments is probably the most important of all **contextual** factors for viewers as they interpret the meaning of what they see on television. Viewers who would otherwise think of a class of behaviors such as violence as bad may eventually learn that those behaviors are good (useful, successful, or desirable) if they are repeatedly and consistently portrayed as rewarded or unpunished. Across all channel types, this study discovered a common pattern that the majority of violent scenes lack any form of punishment for the perpetrators.

- **In a high proportion of violent episodes, the consequences are not realistically portrayed.**

Less than half of violent interactions show the victims experiencing any signs of pain. Furthermore, only about one in six programs depict any long-term negative consequences, such as physical suffering or financial or emotional harm. All of these patterns increase the risk that viewers will believe that violence is not a particularly painful or harmful behavior.

- **Violence is often presented as humorous.**

More than one third of all violent scenes involve a humorous context. Humor tends to **trivialize** or undermine the seriousness with which violence is regarded. Humorous violence can serve to desensitize viewers to the serious or harmful effects of violence.

- **Violent programs rarely employ a strong antiviolence theme.**

Only 4 percent of all television programs emphasize a strong antiviolence theme. *Touched by an Angel*, *Little House on the Prairie*, and *Mr. Rogers* are among the exceptions.

**Source:** Adapted from "National Television Violence Study: Executive Summary." Studio City, CA: Mediascope, Inc., 1998.

## Read and React

1. What was the stated purpose of the first study?
2. Why does the report state that the contextual factors for viewing violence are the most important?
3. Do you think the report reaches its stated purpose (see Question #1)? Why or why not?