5 Socialization

Learning Objectives

**Remember** the definitions of key terms highlighted in boldfaced type throughout the chapter.

**Understand** the nature-nurture debate about human development.

**Apply** the sociological perspective to see how society defines behavior at various stages of the life course.

**Analyze** the contribution of the family, schooling, the peer group, and the mass media to personality development.

**Evaluate** the contributions of six important thinkers to our understanding of the socialization process.

**Create** a complex appreciation for the fact that our personalities are not fixed at birth but develop and change as we interact with others.
On a cold winter day in 1938, a social worker walked quickly to the door of a rural Pennsylvania farmhouse. Investigating a case of possible child abuse, the social worker entered the home and soon discovered a five-year-old girl hidden in a second-floor storage room. The child, whose name was Anna, was wedged into an old chair with her arms tied above her head so that she couldn’t move. She was wearing filthy clothes, and her arms and legs were as thin as matchsticks (K. Davis, 1940).

Anna’s situation can only be described as tragic. She had been born in 1932 to an unmarried and mentally impaired woman of twenty-six who lived with her strict father. Angry about his daughter’s “illegitimate” motherhood, the grandfather did not even want the child in his house, so for the first six months of her life, Anna was passed among several welfare agencies. But her mother could not afford to pay for her care, and Anna was returned to the hostile home of her grandfather.

To lessen the grandfather’s anger, Anna’s mother kept Anna in the storage room and gave her just enough milk to keep her alive. There she stayed—day after day, month after month, with almost no human contact—for five long years.

Learning of Anna’s rescue, the sociologist Kingsley Davis immediately went to see the child. He found her with local officials at a county home. Davis was stunned by the emaciated girl, who could not laugh, speak, or even smile. Anna was completely unresponsive, as if alone in an empty world.

Social Experience: The Key to Our Humanity

Socialization is so basic to human development that we sometimes overlook its importance. But here, in the terrible case of an isolated child, we can see what humans would be like without social contact. Although physically alive, Anna hardly seems to have been human. We can see that without social experience, a child is not able to act or communicate in a meaningful way and seems to be as much an object as a person.

Sociologists use the term socialization to refer to the lifelong social experience by which people develop their human potential and learn culture. Unlike other living species, whose behavior is mostly or entirely set by biology, humans need social experience to learn their culture and to survive. Social experience is also the foundation of personality, a person’s fairly consistent patterns of acting, thinking, and feeling. We build a personality by internalizing—taking in—our surroundings. But without social experience, as Anna’s case shows, personality hardly develops at all.

Human Development: Nature and Nurture

Anna’s case makes clear that humans depend on others to provide the care and nurture needed not only for physical growth but also for personality to develop. A century ago, however, people mistakenly believed that humans were born with instincts that determined their personality and behavior.

The Biological Sciences: The Role of Nature

Charles Darwin’s groundbreaking 1859 study of evolution, described in Chapter 3 (“Culture”), led people to think that human behavior was instinctive, simply our “nature.” Such ideas led to claims that the U.S. economic system reflects “instinctive human competitiveness;” that some people are “born criminals;” or that women are “naturally” emotional while men are “naturally” rational.

People trying to understand cultural diversity also misunderstood Darwin’s thinking. Centuries of world exploration had taught Western Europeans that people behaved quite differently from one society to another. But Europeans linked these differences to biology rather than culture. It was an easy, although incorrect and very damaging,
step to claim that members of technologically simple societies were biologically less evolved and therefore “less human.” This ethnocentric view helped justify colonialism: Why not take advantage of others if they seem not to be human in the same sense that you are?

The Social Sciences: The Role of Nurture

In the twentieth century, biological explanations of human behavior came under fire. The psychologist John B. Watson (1878–1958) developed a theory called behaviorism, which holds that behavior is not instinctive but learned. Thus people everywhere are equally human, differing only in their cultural patterns. In short, Watson rooted human behavior not in nature but in nurture.

Today, social scientists are cautious about describing any human behavior as instinctive. This does not mean that biology plays no part in human behavior. Human life, after all, depends on the functioning of the body. We also know that children often share biological traits (like height and hair color) with their parents and that heredity plays a part in intelligence, musical and artistic talent, and personality (such as how you react to frustration). However, whether you develop your inherited potential depends on how you are raised. For example, unless children use their brain early in life, the brain does not fully develop (Goldsmith, 1983; Begley, 1995).

Without denying the importance of nature, then, we can correctly say that nurture matters more in shaping human behavior. More precisely, nurture is our nature.

Social Isolation

As the story of Anna shows, being cut off from the social world is very harmful to human beings. For ethical reasons, researchers can never place people in total isolation to study what happens. But in the past, they have studied the effects of social isolation on nonhuman primates.

Research with Monkeys

In a classic study, the psychologists Harry and Margaret Harlow (1962) placed rhesus monkeys—whose behavior is in some ways surprisingly similar to that of humans—in various conditions of social isolation. They found that complete isolation (with adequate nutrition) for even six months seriously disturbed the monkeys’ development. When returned to their group, these monkeys were passive, anxious, and fearful.

The Harlows then placed infant rhesus monkeys in cages with an artificial “mother” made of wire mesh with a wooden head and the nipple of a feeding tube where the breast would be. These monkeys also survived but were unable to interact with others when placed in a group.

But monkeys in a third category, isolated with an artificial wire mesh “mother” covered with soft terry cloth, did better. Each of these monkeys would cling to its mother closely. Because these monkeys showed less developmental damage than earlier groups, the Harlows concluded that the monkeys benefited from this closeness.

The experiment confirmed how important it is that adults cradle infants affectionately.

Finally, the Harlows discovered that infant monkeys could recover from about three months of isolation. But by about six months, isolation caused irreversible emotional and behavioral damage.

Studies of Isolated Children

Tragic cases of children isolated by abusive family members show the damage caused by depriving human beings of social experience. We will review three such cases.

Anna: The Rest of the Story

The rest of Anna’s story squares with the Harlows’ findings. After her discovery, Anna received extensive medical attention and soon showed improvement. When Kingsley Davis visited her after ten days, he found her more alert and even
smiling (perhaps for the first time in her life). Over the next year, Anna made slow but steady progress, showing more interest in other people and gradually learning to walk. After a year and a half, she could feed herself and play with toys.

But as the Harlows might have predicted, five long years of social isolation had caused permanent damage. At age eight, her mental development was less than that of a two-year-old. Not until she was almost ten did she begin to use words. Because Anna's mother was mentally retarded, perhaps Anna was also. The riddle was never solved, however, because Anna died at age ten of a blood disorder, possibly related to the years of abuse she suffered (K. Davis, 1940, 1947).

Another Case: Isabelle A second case involves another girl found at about the same time as Anna and under similar circumstances. After more than six years of virtual isolation, this girl, named Isabelle, displayed the same lack of responsiveness as Anna. But Isabelle had the benefit of an intensive learning program directed by psychologists. Within a week, Isabelle was trying to speak, and a year and a half later, she knew some 2,000 words. The psychologists concluded that intensive effort had pushed Isabelle through six years of normal development in only two years. By the time she was fourteen, Isabelle was attending sixth-grade classes, damaged by her early ordeal but on her way to a relatively normal life (K. Davis, 1947).

A Third Case: Genie A more recent case of childhood isolation involves a California girl abused by her parents (Curtiss, 1977; Rymer, 1994). From the time she was two, Genie was tied to a potty chair in a dark garage. In 1970, when she was rescued at age thirteen, Genie weighed only fifty-nine pounds and had the mental development of a one-year-old. With intensive treatment, she became physically healthy, but her language ability remains that of a young child. Today, Genie lives in a home for developmentally disabled adults.

**Evaluate** All evidence points to the crucial importance of social experience in personality development. Human beings can recover from abuse and short-term isolation. But there is a point—precisely when—is unclear from the small number of cases studied—at which isolation in childhood causes permanent developmental damage.

**CHECK YOUR LEARNING** What do studies of isolated children teach us about the importance of social experience?

### Understanding Socialization

Socialization is a complex, lifelong process. The following discussions highlight the work of six researchers—Sigmund Freud, Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, Carol Gilligan, George Herbert Mead, and Erik H. Erikson—who have made lasting contributions to our understanding of human development.

#### Sigmund Freud's Elements of Personality

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) lived in Vienna at a time when most Europeans considered human behavior to be biologically fixed. Trained as a physician, Freud gradually turned to the study of personality and mental disorders and eventually developed the celebrated theory of psychoanalysis.

#### Basic Human Needs

Freud claimed that biology plays a major part in human development, although not in terms of specific instincts, as is the case in other species. Rather, he theorized that humans have two basic needs or drives that are present at birth. First is a need for sexual and emotional bonding, which he called the “life instinct,” or eros (named after the Greek god of love). Second, we share an aggressive drive he called the “death instinct,” or thanatos (the Greek word for “death”). These opposing forces, operating at an unconscious level, create deep inner tension.

#### Freud's Model of Personality

Freud combined basic needs and the influence of society into a model of personality with three parts: id, ego, and superego. The id (Latin for “it”) represents the human being's basic drives, which are unconscious and demand immediate satisfaction. Rooted in biology, the id is present at birth, making a newborn a bundle of demands for attention, touching, and food. But society opposes the self-centered id, which is why one of the first words a child typically learns is “no.”

To avoid frustration, a child must learn to approach the world realistically. This is done through the ego (Latin for “I”), which is a person's conscious efforts to balance innate pleasure-seeking drives with the demands
of society. The ego arises as we become aware of our distinct existence and face the fact that we cannot have everything we want.

In the human personality, the **superego** (Latin for “above or beyond the ego”) is the cultural values and norms internalized by an individual. The superego operates as our conscience, telling us why we cannot have everything we want. The superego begins to form as a child becomes aware of parental demands and matures as the child comes to understand that everyone’s behavior should take account of cultural norms.

**Personality Development**

To the id-centered child, the world is a bewildering assortment of physical sensations that bring either pleasure or pain. As the superego develops, however, the child learns the moral concepts of right and wrong. Initially, in other words, children can feel good only in a physical way (such as by being held and cuddled), but after three or four years, they feel good or bad according to how they judge their behavior against cultural norms (doing “the right thing”).

The id and superego remain in conflict, but in a well-adjusted person, the ego manages these two opposing forces. If conflicts are not resolved during childhood, Freud claimed, they may surface as personality disorders later on.

Culture, in the form of the superego, represses selfish demands, forcing people to look beyond their own desires. Often the competing demands of self and society result in a compromise that Freud called sublimation. Sublimation redirects selfish drives into socially acceptable behavior. For example, marriage makes the satisfaction of sexual urges socially acceptable, and competitive sports are an outlet for aggression.

**Evaluate** In Freud’s time, few people were ready to accept sex as a basic human drive. More recent critics have charged that Freud’s work presents humans in male terms and devalues women (Donovan & Littenberg, 1982). Freud’s theories are also difficult to test scientifically. But Freud influenced everyone who later studied human personality. Of special importance to sociology are his ideas that we internalize social norms and that childhood experiences have a lasting impact on personality.

**CHECK YOUR LEARNING** What are the three elements in Freud’s model of personality? Explain how each one operates.

**Jean Piaget’s Theory of Cognitive Development**

The Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget (1896–1980) studied human cognition, how people think and understand. As Piaget watched his own three children grow, he wondered not just what they knew but also how they made sense of the world. Piaget went on to identify four stages of cognitive development.

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### Freud’s Model of Personality

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>id</strong></td>
<td>Freud’s term for the human being’s basic drives</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ego</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>superego</strong></td>
<td>Freud’s term for the cultural values and norms internalized by an individual</td>
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### The Sensorimotor Stage

Stage one is the **sensorimotor stage**, the level of human development at which individuals experience the world only through their senses. For about the first two years of life, the infant knows the world only through the five senses: touching, tasting, smelling, looking, and listening. “Knowing” to young children amounts to what their senses tell them.

### The Preoperational Stage

About age two, children enter the **preoperational stage**, the level of human development at which individuals first use language and other symbols. Now children begin to think about the world mentally and use imagination. But “pre-op” children between about two and six still attach meaning only to specific experiences and objects. They can identify a toy as their “favorite” but cannot explain what types of toys they like.

Lacking abstract concepts, a child also cannot judge size, weight, or volume. In one of his best-known experiments, Piaget placed two identical glasses containing equal amounts of water on a table. He asked several children aged five and six if the amount in each glass was the same. They nodded that it was. The children then watched Piaget take one of the glasses and pour its contents into a taller, narrower glass so that the level of the water in the glass was higher. He asked again if each glass held the same amount. The typical five- or six-year-old now insisted that the taller glass held more water. By about age seven, children are able to think abstractly and realize that the amount of water stays the same.

### The Concrete Operational Stage

Next comes the **concrete operational stage**, the level of human development at which individuals first see causal connections in their surroundings. Between the ages of seven and eleven, children focus on how and why things happen. In addition, children now attach more than one symbol to a particular event or object. If, for example, you say to a child of five, “Today is Wednesday,” she might respond, “No, it’s my birthday!”—indicating that she can use just one symbol at a time. But a ten-year-old at the concrete operational stage would be able to respond, “Yes, and it’s also my birthday.”

### The Formal Operational Stage

The last stage in Piaget’s model is the **formal operational stage**, the level of human development at which individuals think abstractly and critically.
critically. At about age twelve, young people begin to reason abstractly rather than thinking only of concrete situations. If, for example, you were to ask a seven-year-old, “What would you like to be when you grow up?” you might receive a concrete response such as “a teacher.” But most teenagers can think more abstractly and might reply, “I would like to do something that helps others.” As they gain the capacity for abstract thought, young people also learn to understand metaphors. Hearing the phrase “A penny for your thoughts” might lead a child to ask for a coin, but a teenager will recognize a gentle invitation to intimacy.

Evaluate  Freud saw human beings torn by opposing forces of biology and culture. Piaget saw the mind as active and creative. He saw an ability to engage the world unfolding in stages as the result of both biological maturation and social experience.

But do people in all societies pass through all four of Piaget’s stages? Living in a traditional society that changes slowly probably limits a person’s capacity for abstract and critical thought. Even in the United States, perhaps 30 percent of people never reach the formal operational stage (Kohlberg & Gilligan, 1971).

CHECK YOUR LEARNING  What are Piaget’s four stages of cognitive development? What does his theory teach us about socialization?

Lawrence Kohlberg’s Theory of Moral Development

Lawrence Kohlberg (1981) built on Piaget’s work to study moral reasoning, how individuals judge situations as right or wrong. Here again, development occurs in stages.

Young children who experience the world in terms of pain and pleasure (Piaget’s sensorimotor stage) are at the preconventional level of moral development. At this early stage, in other words, “rightness” amounts to “what feels good to me.” For example, a young child may simply reach for something on a table that looks shiny, which is the reason parents of young children have to “childproof” their homes.

The conventional level, Kohlberg’s second stage, appears by the teen years (corresponding to Piaget’s final, formal operational stage). At this point, young people lose some of their selfishness as they learn to define right and wrong in terms of what pleases parents and conforms to cultural norms. Individuals at this stage also begin to assess intention in reaching moral judgments instead of simply looking at what people do. For example, they understand that stealing food to feed one’s hungry children is not the same as stealing an iPod to sell for pocket change.

In Kohlberg’s final stage of moral development, the postconventional level, people move beyond their society’s norms to consider abstract ethical principles. Now they think about liberty, freedom, or justice, perhaps arguing that what is legal still may not be right. When the African American activist Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a Montgomery, Alabama, bus in 1955, she violated that city’s segregation laws in order to call attention to the racial injustice of the law.

Evaluate  Like the work of Piaget, Kohlberg’s model explains moral development in terms of distinct stages. But whether this model applies to people in all societies remains unclear. Further, many people in the United States apparently never reach the postconventional level of moral reasoning, although exactly why is still an open question.

Another problem with Kohlberg’s research is that his subjects were all boys. He committed a common research error, described in Chapter 2 (“Sociological Investigation”), by generalizing the results of male subjects to all people. This problem led a colleague, Carol Gilligan, to investigate how gender affects moral reasoning.

CHECK YOUR LEARNING  What are Kohlberg’s three stages of moral development? What does his theory teach us about socialization?

Carol Gilligan’s Theory of Gender and Moral Development

Carol Gilligan, whose approach is highlighted in the Thinking About Diversity box, compared the moral development of girls and boys and concluded that the two sexes use different standards of rightness.

Boys, Gilligan (1982, 1990) claims, have a justice perspective, relying on formal rules to define right and wrong. Girls, by contrast, have a care and responsibility perspective, judging a situation with an eye toward personal relationships and loyalties. For example, as boys see it, stealing is wrong because it breaks the law. Girls are more likely to wonder why someone would steal and to be sympathetic toward a person who steals, say, to feed her family. Kohlberg treats rule-based male reasoning as superior to the person-based female approach. Gilligan notes that impersonal rules dominate men’s lives in the workplace, but personal relationships are more relevant to women’s lives as mothers and caregivers. Why, then, Gilligan asks, should we set up male standards as the norms by which to judge everyone?

Evaluate  Gilligan’s work sharpens our understanding of both human development and
Carol Gilligan (1990) has shown how gender guides social behavior. Her early work exposed the gender bias in studies by Kohlberg and others who had used only male subjects. But as her research progressed, Gilligan made a major discovery: Boys and girls actually use different standards in making moral decisions. By ignoring gender, we end up with an incomplete view of human behavior.

Gilligan has also looked at the effect of gender on self-esteem. Her research team interviewed more than 2,000 girls, aged six to eighteen, over a five-year period. She found a clear pattern: Young girls start out eager and confident, but their self-esteem slips away as they pass through adolescence.

Why? Gilligan claims that the answer lies in our society’s socialization of females. In U.S. society, the ideal woman is calm, controlled, and eager to please. Then too, as girls move from the elementary grades to secondary school, they have fewer women teachers and find that most authority figures are men. As a result, by their late teens, girls struggle to regain the personal strength they had a decade earlier.

When their research was finished, Gilligan and her colleagues returned to a private girls’ school where they had interviewed their subjects to share the results of their work. As their conclusions led them to expect, most of the younger girls who had been interviewed were eager to have their names appear in the forthcoming book. But the older girls were hesitant—many were fearful that they would be talked about.

What Do You Think?
1. How does Gilligan’s research show the importance of gender in the socialization process?
2. Do you think boys are subject to some of the same pressures and difficulties as girls? What about the fact that a much smaller share of boys than girls make it to college? Explain your answer.
3. Can you think of ways in which your gender has shaped the development of your personality? Point out three significant ways gender has shaped your own life.

CHECK YOUR LEARNING  According to Gilligan, how do boys and girls differ in their approach to understanding right and wrong?

George Herbert Mead’s Theory of the Social Self

George Herbert Mead (1863–1931) developed the theory of social behaviorism to explain how social experience develops an individual’s personality (1962, orig. 1934).

The Self

Mead’s central concept is the self, the part of an individual’s personality composed of self-awareness and self-image. Mead’s genius was in seeing the self as the product of social experience.

First, said Mead, the self is not there at birth; it develops. The self is not part of the body, and it does not exist at birth. Mead rejected the idea that personality is guided by biological drives (as Freud asserted) or biological maturation (as Piaget claimed).

Second, Mead explained, the self develops only with social experience, as the individual interacts with others. Without interaction, as we see from cases of isolated children, the body grows, but no self emerges.

Third, Mead continued, social experience is the exchange of symbols. Only people use words, a wave of the hand, or a smile to create meaning. We can train a dog using reward and punishment, but the dog attaches no meaning to its actions. Human beings, by contrast, find meaning in almost every action.

Fourth, Mead stated that seeking meaning leads people to imagine other people’s intentions. In short, we draw conclusions from people’s actions, imagining their underlying intentions. A dog responds to what you do; a human responds to what you have in mind as you do it. You can train a dog to go to the hallway and bring back an umbrella, which is handy on a rainy day. But because the dog doesn’t understand intention, if the dog cannot find the umbrella, it is incapable of the human response: to look for a raincoat instead.

Fifth, Mead explained that understanding intention requires imagining the situation from the other’s point of view. Using symbols, we imagine ourselves “in another person’s shoes” and see ourselves as that person does. We can therefore anticipate how others will respond to us even before we act. A simple toss of a ball requires stepping outside ourselves to imagine how another will catch our throw. All social interaction involves seeing ourselves as others see us—a process that Mead termed taking the role of the other.

The Looking-Glass Self

As we interact with others, the people around us become a mirror (an object that people used to call a “looking glass”) in which we can see ourselves. What we think of ourselves, then, depends on how we think others see us. For example, if we think others see us as clever, we will think of ourselves in the same way. But if we feel they think of us as clumsy, then that is how we will see ourselves. Charles Hor-
ton Cooley (1864–1929) used the phrase **looking-glass self** to mean a self-image based on how we think others see us (1964, orig. 1902).

**The I and the Me**

Mead’s sixth point is that by taking the role of the other, we become self-aware. Another way of saying this is that the self has two parts. One part of the self operates as the subject, being active and spontaneous. Mead called the active side of the self the “I” (the subjective form of the personal pronoun). The other part of the self works as an object, that is, the way we imagine others see us. Mead called the objective side of the self the “me” (the objective form of the personal pronoun). All social experience has both components: We initiate an action (the I-phase, or subject side, of self), and then we continue the action based on how others respond to us (the me-phase, or object side, of self).

**Development of the Self**

According to Mead, the key to developing the self is learning to take the role of the other. Because of their limited social experience, infants can do this only through imitation. They mimic behavior without understanding underlying intentions, and so at this point, they have no self.

As children learn to use language and other symbols, the self emerges in the form of play. Play involves assuming roles modeled on significant others, people, such as parents, who have special importance for socialization. Playing “mommy and daddy” is an important activity that helps young children imagine the world from a parent’s point of view.

Gradually, children learn to take the roles of several others at once. This skill lets them move from simple play (say, playing catch) with one other to complex games (such as baseball) involving many others. By about age seven, most children have the social experience needed to engage in team sports.

Figure 5–1 charts the progression from imitation to play to games. But there is a final stage in the development of the self. A game involves taking the role of specific people in just one situation. Everyday life demands that we see ourselves in terms of cultural norms as any member of our society might. Mead used the term **generalized other** to refer to widespread cultural norms and values we use as references in evaluating ourselves.

As life goes on, the self continues to change along with our social experiences. But no matter how much the world shapes us, we always remain creative beings, able to react to the world around us. Thus, Mead concluded, we play a key role in our own socialization.

**Evaluate**

Mead’s work explores the character of social experience itself. In the symbolic interaction of human beings, he believed he had found the root of both self and society.

Mead’s view is completely social, allowing no biological element at all. This is a problem for critics who stand with Freud (who said our general drives are rooted in the body) and Piaget (whose stages of development are tied to biological maturity).

Be careful not to confuse Mead’s concepts of the I and the me with Freud’s id and superego. For Freud, the id originates in our biology, but Mead rejected any biological element of the self (although he never clearly spelled out the origin of the I). In addition, the id and the superego are locked in continual combat, but the I and the me work cooperatively together (Meltzer, 1978).

**CHECK YOUR LEARNING**

Explain the meaning and importance of Mead’s concepts of the I and the me. What did Mead mean by “taking the role of the other”? Why is this process so important to socialization?
Erik H. Erikson’s Eight Stages of Development

Although some analysts (including Freud) point to childhood as the crucial time when personality takes shape, Erik H. Erikson (1902–1994) took a broader view of socialization. He explained that we face challenges throughout the life course (1963, orig. 1950).

Stage 1: Infancy— the challenge of trust (versus mistrust). Between birth and about eighteen months, infants face the first of life’s challenges: to establish a sense of trust that their world is a safe place. Family members play a key part in how any infant meets this challenge.

Stage 2: Toddlerhood— the challenge of autonomy (versus doubt and shame). The next challenge, up to age three, is to learn skills to cope with the world in a confident way. Failing to gain self-control leads children to doubt their abilities.

Stage 3: Preschool— the challenge of initiative (versus guilt). Four- and five-year-olds must learn to engage their surroundings—including people outside the family—or experience guilt at failing to meet the expectations of parents and others.

Stage 4: Preadolescence— the challenge of industriousness (versus inferiority). Between ages six and thirteen, children enter school, make friends, and strike out on their own more and more. They either feel proud of their accomplishments or fear that they do not measure up.

Stage 5: Adolescence— the challenge of gaining identity (versus confusion). During the teen years, young people struggle to establish their own identity. In part, teenagers identify with others, but they also want to be unique. Almost all teens experience some confusion as they struggle to establish an identity.

Stage 6: Young adulthood— the challenge of intimacy (versus isolation). The challenge for young adults is to form and maintain intimate relationships with others. Falling in love (as well as making close friends) involves balancing the need to bond with the need to have a separate identity.

Stage 7: Middle adulthood— the challenge of making a difference (versus self-absorption). The challenge of middle age is contributing to the lives of others in the family, at work, and in the larger world. Failing at this, people become self-centered, caught up in their own limited concerns.

Stage 8: Old age— the challenge of integrity (versus despair). As the end of life approaches, people hope to look back on what they have accomplished with a sense of integrity and satisfaction. For those who have been self-absorbed, old age brings only a sense of despair over missed opportunities.

Evaluate  Erikson’s theory views personality formation as a lifelong process, with success at one stage (say, as an infant gaining trust) preparing us to meet the next challenge. However, not everyone faces these challenges in the exact order presented by Erikson. Nor is it clear that failure to meet the challenge of one stage of life means that a person is doomed to fail later on. A broader question, raised earlier in our discussion of Piaget’s ideas, is whether people in other cultures and in other times in history would define a successful life in Erikson’s terms.

In sum, Erikson’s model points out that many factors, including the family and school, shape our personalities. In the next section, we take a close look at these important agents of socialization.

CHECK YOUR LEARNING  In what ways does Erikson take a broader view of socialization than other thinkers presented in this chapter?

Agents of Socialization

Socialization indicates that wealthy parents tend to encourage creativity in their children while poor parents tend to foster conformity. Although this general difference may be valid, parents at all class levels can and do provide loving support and guidance by simply involving themselves in their children’s lives. Henry Ossawa Tanner’s painting The Banjo Lesson stands as a lasting testament to this process.

The Family
The family affects socialization in many ways. For most people, in fact, the family may be the most important socialization agent of all.

Nurture in Early Childhood
Infants are totally dependent on others for care. The responsibility for providing a safe and caring environment typically falls on parents and other family members. For several years—at least until children begin school—the family also has the job of teaching children skills, values, and beliefs. Overall, research suggests, nothing is more likely to produce a happy, well-adjusted child than a loving family (Gibbs, 2001).

Not all family learning results from intentional teaching by parents. Children also learn from the type of environment adults create. Whether children learn to see themselves as strong or weak, smart or stupid, loved or simply tolerated—and as Erik Erikson suggests, whether they see the world as trustworthy or dangerous—depends largely on the quality of the surroundings provided by parents and other caregivers.

Race and Class
Through the family, parents give a social identity to children. In part, social identity involves race. Racial identity can be complex because, as Chapter 14 (“Race and Ethnicity”) explains, societies define race in various ways. In addition, in 2010, more than 7.5 million people (2.4 percent) census more than said they consider themselves to be of two or more racial categories. This number was 1.4 percent back in 2000, so it is rising. The figure is certain to continue to go up, as an even larger share (about 4 percent) of all births in the United States are now recorded as interracial (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). National Map 5–1 shows where people who describe themselves as racially mixed live.

Social class, like race, plays a large part in shaping a child’s personality. Whether born into families of high or low social position, children gradually come to realize that their family’s social standing affects how others see them and, in time, how they come to see themselves.

In addition, research shows that class position affects not just how much money parents have to spend on their children but also what parents expect of them (Ellison, Bartkowski, & Segal, 1996).
When people in the United States were asked to pick from a list of traits that are desirable in a child, parents of all social class backgrounds claim that they want their child to be “popular.” But almost 60 percent of parents from the lower class point to “obedience” as a key trait in a child, compared to only about 40 percent of parents in the upper class. By contrast, well-to-do parents are more likely than low-income parents to praise children who can “think for themselves” (NORC, 2011).

What accounts for the difference? Melvin Kohn (1977) explains that people of lower social standing usually have limited education and perform routine jobs under close supervision. Expecting that their children will hold similar positions, they encourage obedience and may even use physical punishment like spanking to get it. Because well-off parents have had more schooling, they usually have jobs that demand independence, imagination, and creativity, so they try to inspire the same qualities in their children. Consciously or not, all parents act in ways that encourage their children to follow in their footsteps.

Wealthier parents are more likely to push their children to achieve, and they also typically provide their daughters and sons with an extensive program of leisure activities, including sports, travel, and music lessons. These enrichment activities—far less available to children growing up in low-income families—build cultural capital, which advances learning and creates a sense of confidence in these children that they will succeed later in life (Lareau, 2002; NORC, 2011).

Social class also affects how long the process of becoming an adult for as long as ten years, past the age of thirty.

### The School

Schooling enlarges children’s social world to include people with backgrounds different from their own. It is only as they encounter people who differ from themselves that children come to understand the importance of factors such as race and social position. As they do, they are likely to cluster in playgroups made up of one class, race, and gender.

### Gender

Schools join with families in socializing children into gender roles. Studies show that at school, boys engage in more physical activities and spend more time outdoors, and girls are more likely to help teachers with various housekeeping chores. Boys also engage in more aggressive behavior in the classroom, while girls are typically quieter and better behaved (Best, 1983; Jordan & Cowan, 1995).
Global Snapshot

FIGURE 5–2 Television Ownership in Global Perspective

Television is popular in high- and middle-income countries, where almost every household owns at least one TV set.
Sources: U.S. Census Bureau (2010); World Bank (2010).

What Children Learn

Schooling is not the same for children living in rich and poor communities. As Chapter 20 (“Education”) explains, children from well-off families typically have a far better experience in school than those whose families are poor.

For all children, the lessons learned in school include more than the formal lesson plans. Schools also informally teach many things, which together might be called the hidden curriculum. Activities such as spelling bees teach children not only how to spell words but also how society divides the population into “winners” and “losers.” Organized sports help students develop their strength and skills and also teach children important life lessons in cooperation and competition.

For most children, school is also the first experience with bureaucracy. The school day is based on impersonal rules and a strict time schedule. Not surprisingly, these are also the traits of the large organizations that will employ young people later in life.

The Peer Group

By the time they enter school, children have joined a peer group, a social group whose members have interests, social position, and age in common. Unlike the family and the school, the peer group lets children escape the direct supervision of adults. Among their peers, children learn how to form relationships on their own. Peer groups also offer the chance to discuss interests that adults may not share with their children (such as clothing and popular music) or permit (such as drugs and sex).

It is not surprising, then, that parents often express concern about who their children’s friends are. In a rapidly changing society, peer groups have great influence, and the attitudes of young and old may differ because of a “generation gap.” The importance of peer groups typically peaks during adolescence, when young people begin to break away from their families and think of themselves as adults.

Even during adolescence, however, parental influence on children remains strong. Peers may affect short-term interests such as music or films, but parents have greater influence on long-term goals, such as going to college (Davies & Kandel, 1981).

Finally, any neighborhood or school is made up of many peer groups. As Chapter 7 (“Groups and Organizations”) explains, individuals tend to view their own group in positive terms and put down other groups. In addition, people are influenced by peer groups they would like to join, a process sociologists call anticipatory socialization, learning that helps a person achieve a desired position. In school, for example, young people may copy the styles and slang of a group they hope will accept them. Later in life, a young lawyer who hopes to become a partner in the law firm may conform to the attitudes and behavior of the firm’s partners in order to be accepted.

The Mass Media

August 30, Isle of Coll, off the west coast of Scotland. The last time we visited this remote island, there was no electricity and most of the people spoke the ancient Gaelic language. Now that a power cable comes from the mainland, homes have lights, appliances, television, and the Internet! Almost with the flip of a switch, this tiny place has been thrust into the modern world. It is no surprise that the island’s traditions are fast disappearing, with few performances of its historical dancing or music to be found. A rising share of the population now consists of mainlanders who ferry over with their cars to spend time in their vacation homes. And everyone now speaks English.

The mass media are the means for delivering impersonal communications to a vast audience. The term media (plural of medium) comes from the Latin word for “middle,” suggesting that media connect people. Mass media arise as communications technology (first newspapers and then radio, television, films, and the Internet) spreads information on a massive scale.

In the United States today, the mass media have an enormous influence on our attitudes and behavior. Television, introduced in the 1930s, became the dominant medium after World War II, and 98 percent of U.S. households now have at least one set (by comparison, just 95 percent have telephones). Five out of six households also have cable or satellite television. As Figure 5–2 shows, the United States has one of the highest rates of television ownership in the world. In this country, it is people with lower incomes who spend the most time watching TV as well as using their television to watch movies and to play video games (Nielsen Media Research, 2008; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).
The Extent of Mass Media Exposure
Just how “glued to the tube” are we? Survey data show that the average household has at least one television set turned on for eight hours each day and that people spend more than half their free time watching television. One study, by the Kaiser Family Foundation, found that, compared to adults, school-age youngsters typically spend even more time—about seven and a half hours each day—watching television or playing video games. The extent of daily television viewing is greater for African American children (averaging almost six hours) and Hispanic children (almost five and a half hours) than for white children (about three and a half hours).

About two-thirds of U.S. children report that the television is typically on during meals, and more than 70 percent claim that parents do not limit the amount of time they spend in front of the screen. Younger children favor watching television and playing video games; as children get older, music videos and Web surfing become a bigger part of the mix. At all ages, boys favor video games and girls lean toward music videos (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010; Nielsen Media Research, 2011).

Years before children learn to read, television watching is a regular part of their daily routine. As they grow, children spend as many hours in front of a television as they do in school or interacting with their parents. This is the case despite research suggesting that television makes children more passive and less likely to use their imagination. Researchers explain that most television is not itself harmful to children; however, watching television prevents children from engaging in other activities—especially interacting with other children and adults—which is vital to social and mental development (American Psychological Association, 1993; Fellman, 1995; Shute, 2010).

Television and Politics
The comedian Fred Allen once quipped that we call television a “medium” because it is “rarely well done.” For a number of reasons, television (as well as other mass media) provokes plenty of criticism. Some liberal critics argue that for most of television’s history, racial and ethnic minorities have not been visible or have been included only in stereotypical roles (such as African Americans playing butlers and maids, Asian Americans playing gardeners, or Hispanics playing new immigrants). In recent years, however, minorities have moved closer to center stage on television. There are ten times as many Hispanic actors on prime-time television as there were in the 1970s, and they play a far larger range of characters (Lichter & Amundson, 1997; Fetto, 2003b).

On the other side of the fence, conservative critics charge that the television and film industries are dominated by a liberal “cultural elite.” In recent years, they claim, “politically correct” media have advanced liberal causes, including feminism and gay rights (Rothman, Powers, & Rothman, 1993; B. Goldberg, 2002). But not everyone agrees, with some studies suggesting that the mainstream media are fairly conservative on many issues (Adkins & Washburn, 2007). In addition, some television cable channels (such as MSNBC) have a decidedly liberal point of view, while others (such as Fox Network) are more conservative.

One study of the 2008 presidential election found that the Democratic candidate Barack Obama was endorsed by almost three times as many U.S. newspapers as Republican candidate John McCain (“Ongoing Tally,” 2008). At the same time, research suggests that a wide range of political opinion is available in today’s mass media and that most of us tend to focus on those media sources, whether more liberal or more conservative, that are closer to our own personal opinions (Morris, 2007).

Television and Violence
In 1996, the American Medical Association issued the startling statement that violence in television and films had reached such a high level that it posed a hazard to our health. More recently, a study found a strong link between aggressive behavior and the amount of time elementary school children spend watching television and playing video games (Robinson et al., 2001). The public is concerned about this issue: Three-fourths of U.S. adults report having walked out of a movie or turned off the television because of too much violence. About two-thirds of parents say that they are “very concerned” that their children are exposed to too much media violence. There may be reason for this concern: Almost two-thirds of television programs contain violence, and in most such scenes, violent characters show no remorse and are not punished (B. J. Wilson, 1998; Rideout, 2007).

Back in 1997, the television industry adopted a rating system. But we are left to wonder whether watching sexual or violent programming harms people as much as critics say. More important,
why do the mass media contain so much sex and violence in the first place?

Television and the other mass media enrich our lives with entertaining and educational programming. The media also increase our exposure to diverse cultures and provoke discussion of current issues. At the same time, the power of the media—especially television—to shape how we think remains highly controversial.

Evaluate This section shows that socialization is complex, with many different factors shaping our personalities as we grow. In addition, these factors do not always work together. For instance, children learn certain things from peer groups and the mass media that may conflict with what they learn at home.

Beyond family, school, peer group, and the media, other spheres of life also play a part in social learning. For most people in the United States, these include the workplace, religious organizations, the military, and social clubs. In the end, socialization proves to be not just a simple matter of learning but a complex balancing act as we absorb information from a variety of sources. In the process of sorting and weighing all the information we receive, we form our own distinctive personalities.

CHECK YOUR LEARNING Identify all the major agents of socialization discussed in this section of the chapter. What are some of the unique ways that each of these helps us develop our individual personalities?
Socialization and the Life Course

**Apply**

Although childhood has special importance in the socialization process, learning continues throughout our lives. An overview of the life course reveals that our society organizes human experience according to age—childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age.

**Childhood**

A few years ago, the Nike Corporation, maker of popular athletic shoes, came under attack. Its shoes are made in Taiwan and Indonesia, in many cases by children who work in factories instead of going to school. About 200 million of the world's children work, with 60 percent of working children doing farming. Half of the world's working children are in Asia, while another one-fourth are in Africa. About half of them labor full time, and one-third of these boys and girls do work that is dangerous to their physical and mental health. For their efforts, they earn very little—typically, about 50 cents an hour (Human Rights Watch, 2006; International Labor Organization, 2010; Thrupkaew, 2010; U.S. Department of Labor, 2010). Global Map 5–1 shows that child labor is most common in Africa and Asia.

Criticism of Nike springs from the fact that most North Americans think of childhood—roughly the first twelve years of life—as a carefree time for learning and play. Yet the historian Philippe Ariès (1965) explains, the whole idea of "childhood" is fairly new. During the Middle Ages, children of four or five were treated like adults and expected to fend for themselves.

We defend our idea of childhood because children are biologically immature. But a look back in time and around the world shows that the concept of childhood is grounded not in biology but in culture (LaRossa & Reitzes, 2001). In rich countries, not everyone has to work, so childhood can be extended to allow time for young people to learn the skills they will need in a high-technology workplace.

Because childhood in the United States lasts such a long time, some people worry when children seem to be growing up too fast. In part, this “hurried child” syndrome results from changes in the family—including high divorce rates and both parents in the labor force—that leave children with less supervision. In addition, “adult” programming on television (not to mention in films and on the Internet) carries grown-up concerns such as sex, drugs, and violence into young people’s lives. Today’s ten- to twelve-year-olds, says one executive of a children’s television channel, have about the same interests and experiences typical of twelve- to fourteen-year-olds a generation ago. Perhaps this is why today’s children, compared to kids fifty years ago, have higher levels of stress and anxiety (K. S. Hymowitz, 1998; Gorman, 2000; Hoffman, 2010).

**Adolescence**

At the same time that industrialization created childhood as a distinct stage of life, adolescence emerged as a buffer between childhood and adulthood. We generally link adolescence, or the teenage years, with emotional and social turmoil as young people struggle to develop their own identities. Again, we are tempted to attribute teenage rebelliousness and confusion to the biological changes of puberty. But it is in fact the result of cultural inconsistency. For example, the mass media glorify sex and schools hand out condoms, even as parents urge restraint. Consider, too, that an eighteen-year-old may face the adult duty of going to war but lacks the adult right to drink a beer. In short, adolescence is a time of social contradictions, when people are no longer children but not yet adults.

As is true of all stages of life, adolescence varies according to social background. Most young people from working-class families move directly from high school into the adult world of work and parenting. Wealthier teens, however, have the resources to attend college and perhaps graduate school, stretching their adolescent years into the late twenties and even the thirties (T. W. Smith, 2003). The Thinking About Diversity box on page 116 provides an example of how race and ethnicity can shape the academic performance of high school students.

**Adulthood**

If stages of the life course were based on biological changes, it would be easy to define adulthood. Regardless of exactly when it begins, adulthood is the time when most of life’s accomplishments take place, including pursuing a career and raising a family. Personalities are largely formed by then, although marked changes in a person’s environment—such as unemployment, divorce, or serious illness—may cause significant changes to the self.

**Early Adulthood**

During early adulthood—until about age forty—young adults learn to manage day-to-day affairs for themselves, often juggling conflicting
priorities: schooling, job, partner, children, and parents. During this stage of life, many women try to “do it all,” a pattern that reflects the fact that our culture gives them the major responsibility for child rearing and housework even if they have demanding jobs outside the home.

Middle Adulthood
In middle adulthood—roughly ages forty to sixty-five—people sense that their life circumstances are pretty well set. They also become more aware of the fragility of health, which the young typically take for granted. Women who have spent many years raising a family find middle adulthood emotionally trying. Children grow up and require less attention, and husbands become absorbed in their careers, leaving some women with spaces in their lives that are difficult to fill. Many women who divorce also face serious financial problems (Weltzian, 1985, 1996). For all these reasons, an increasing number of women in middle adulthood return to school and seek new careers.

For everyone, growing older means experiencing physical decline, a prospect our culture makes especially challenging for women. Because good looks are considered more important for women, the appearance of wrinkles and graying hair can be traumatic. Men have their own particular difficulties as they get older. Some must admit that they are never going to reach earlier career goals. Others realize that the price of career success has been neglect of family or personal health.

Old Age
Old age—the later years of adulthood and the final stage of life itself—begins around the mid-sixties. In the United States, about one in eight people is at least age sixty-five, and the elderly now outnumber teenagers (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).
Once again, societies attach different meanings to this stage of life. As explained in Chapter 15 (“Aging and the Elderly”), it is older members of traditional societies who typically control most of the land and other wealth. Also, since traditional societies change slowly, older people possess useful wisdom gained over their lifetime, which earns them much respect.

In industrial societies, however, most younger people work and live apart from their parents, becoming independent of their elders. Rapid change also gives our society a “youth orientation” that defines the young as more “hip” and “with it,” and what is old as unimportant or even obsolete. To younger people, the elderly may seem out of touch with new trends and fashions, and their knowledge and experience may seem of little value.

Perhaps this anti-elderly bias will decline as the share of older people in the United States steadily increases. The percentage of the U.S. population over age sixty-five has more than tripled in the past hundred years. With life expectancy still increasing, most men and women in their mid-sixties today (the “young elderly”) can look forward to living decades longer. Analysts predict that by 2030, the number of seniors will double to 72 million, and the “average” person in the United States will be close to forty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Old age differs in an important way from earlier stages in the life course. Growing up typically means entering new roles and taking on new responsibilities, but growing old is the opposite experience—leaving roles that provided both satisfaction and social identity. For some people, retirement is a period of restful activity, but for others, it can mean losing valued routines and even outright boredom. Like any life transition, retirement demands learning new patterns while at the same time letting go of habits from the past.

Death and Dying
Throughout most of human history, low living standards and limited medical technology meant that death from accident or disease could come at any stage of life. Today, however, 84 percent of people in the United States die after age fifty-five (Xu et al., 2010).

After observing many people as they were dying, the psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1969) described death as an orderly transition involving five distinct stages. Typically, a person first faces death with denial, perhaps out of fear and perhaps because our culture tends to ignore the reality of death. The second phase is anger, when a person facing death sees it as a gross injustice. Third, anger gives way to negotiation as the person imagines the possibility of avoiding death by striking a bargain with God. The fourth response, resignation, is often accompanied by psychological depression. Finally, a complete adjustment to death requires acceptance. At this point, no longer paralyzed by fear and anxiety, the person whose life is ending sets out to find peace and makes the most of whatever time remains.

More recent research has shown that Kübler-Ross simplified the process of dying—not everyone passes through these stages or does so in the order in which she presents them (Konigsberg, 2011). At the same time, this research has helped draw attention to death and dying. As the share of women and men in old age increases, we can expect our culture to become more comfortable with the idea of death. In recent years, people in the United States have started talking about death more openly, and the trend is toward viewing dying as preferable to prolonged suffering. More married couples now prepare for death with legal and financial planning. This openness may ease somewhat the pain of the surviving spouse, a consideration for women, who, more often than not, outlive their husbands.

The Life Course: Patterns and Variations
This brief look at the life course points to two major conclusions. First, although each stage of life is linked to the biological process of aging, the life course is largely a social construction. For this reason, people in other societies may experience a stage of life quite differently or, for that matter, not at all. Second, in any society, the stages of the life course present certain problems and transitions that involve learning something new and, in many cases, unlearning familiar routines.

Societies organize the life course according to age, but other forces, such as class, race, ethnicity, and gender, also shape people’s lives. This means that the general patterns described in this chapter apply somewhat differently to various categories of people.

People’s life experiences also vary, depending on when, in the history of the society, they were born. A cohort is a category of people with something in common, usually their age. Because members of a particular age cohort are generally influenced by the same economic and cultural trends, they tend to have similar attitudes and values. Women and men born in the 1940s and 1950s, for example, grew up during a time of economic expansion that gave them a sense of optimism. Today’s college students, who

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A cohort is a category of similar-age people who share common life experiences. Just as audiences at Rolling Stones concerts in the 1960s were mainly young people, so most of the group’s fans today are the same people, now over age sixty.
have grown up in an age of economic uncertainty, are less confident about the future.

**Apply**

Resocialization: Total Institutions

A final type of socialization, experienced by about 2.5 million people in the United States, involves being confined—usually against their will—in prisons or mental hospitals (U.S. Department of Justice, 2010; U.S. National Institute of Mental Health, 2011). This is the world of the **total institution**, a setting in which people are isolated from the rest of society and manipulated by an administrative staff.

According to Erving Goffman (1961), total institutions have three important characteristics. First, staff members supervise all aspects of daily life, including when and where residents (often called “inmates”) eat, sleep, and work. Second, life in a total institution is controlled and standardized, with the same food, uniforms, and activities for everyone. Third, formal rules dictate when, where, and how inmates perform their daily routines.

The purpose of such rigid routines is **resocialization**, radically changing an inmate's personality by carefully controlling the environment. Prisons and mental hospitals physically isolate inmates behind fences, barred windows, and locked doors and limit their access to the telephone, mail, and visitors. The institution becomes their entire world, making it easier for the staff to bring about personality change—or at least obedience—in the inmate.

Resocialization is a two-part process. First, the staff breaks down the new inmate's existing identity. For example, an inmate must give up personal possessions, including clothing and grooming articles used to maintain a distinctive appearance. Instead, the staff provides standard-issue clothes so that everyone looks alike. The staff subjects new inmates to “mortifications of self,” which can include searches, head shaving, medical examinations, fingerprinting, and assignment of a serial number. Once inside the walls, individuals also give up their privacy as guards routinely inspect their living quarters.

In the second part of the resocialization process, the staff tries to build a new self in the inmate through a system of rewards and punishments. Having a book to read, watching television, or making a telephone call may seem like minor pleasures to the outsider, but in the rigid environment of the total institution, gaining such simple privileges as these can be a powerful motivation to conform. The length of confinement typically depends on how well the inmate cooperates with the staff.

Total institutions affect people in different ways. Some inmates may end up “rehabilitated” or “recovered,” but others may change little, and still others may become hostile and bitter. Over a long period of time, living in a rigidly controlled environment can leave some people institutionalized, without the capacity for independent living.

But what about the rest of us? Does socialization crush our individuality or empower us to reach our creative potential? The Controversy & Debate box takes a closer look at this question.

Prisons are one example of a total institution in which inmates dress alike and carry out daily routines under the direct supervision and control of institutional staff. What do we expect prison to do to young people convicted of crimes? How well do you think prisons do what people expect them to?
Mike: Sociology is a really interesting course. Since my professor started telling us how to look at the world with a sociological eye, I’m realizing that a lot of who I am and where I am is because of society.

Kim: (teasingly) Oh, so society is responsible for you turning out so smart and witty and good-looking?

Mike: No, that’s all me. But I’m seeing that being at college and playing football is maybe not all me. I mean, it’s at least also about social class and gender. What people are and the society around them can never be completely separated.

This chapter stresses one key theme: Society shapes how we think, feel, and act. If this is so, then in what sense are we free? To answer this important question, consider the Muppets, puppet stars of television and film that many of us remember from childhood. Watching the antics of Kermit the Frog, Miss Piggy, and the rest of the troupe, we almost believe they are real rather than objects controlled from backstage or below. As the sociological perspective points out, human beings are like puppets in that we, too, respond to backstage forces. Society, after all, gives us a culture and also shapes our lives according to class, race, and gender. If this is so, can we really claim to be free?

Sociologists answer this question with many voices. The politically liberal response is that individuals are not free of society—in fact, as social creatures, we never could be. But if we have to live in a society with power over us, then it is important to do what we can to make our world more socially just. We can do this by trying to lessen inequality, working to reduce class differences and to eliminate barriers to opportunity that hold back minorities, including women. A more conservative response is that, yes, society does shape our lives but we should also realize that we can remain free all the same because, first, to the extent that we believe in our way of life, society does not seem oppressive. Second, even when we run up against social barriers that we do not accept, we remain free because society can never dictate our dreams. Our history as a nation, right from the revolutionary acts that led to its founding, is one story after another of people pursuing personal goals despite great odds.

All of these arguments can be found in George Herbert Mead’s analysis of socialization. Mead knew that society makes demands on us, sometimes limiting our options. But he also saw that human beings are spontaneous and creative, capable of continually acting on society both with acceptance and with efforts to bring about change. Mead noted the power of society while still affirming the human capacity to evaluate, criticize, and ultimately choose and change.

In the end, then, we may seem like puppets, but this impression is correct only on the surface. A crucial difference is that we have the ability to stop, look up at the “strings” that make us move, decide what we think about them, and even yank on the strings defiantly (Berger, 1963:176). If our pull is strong enough, we can accomplish more than we might think. As Margaret Mead once remarked, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

What Do You Think?

1. Do you think that our society gives more freedom to males than to females? Why or why not?
2. Do you think that most people in our society feel that they have some control over their lives or not? Why?
3. Has learning about socialization increased or decreased your feeling of freedom? Why?
When do we grow up and become adults?

As this chapter explains, many factors come into play in the process of moving from one stage of the life course to another. In global perspective, what makes our society unusual is that there is no one event that clearly tells everyone (and us, too) that the milestone of adulthood has been reached. We have important events that say, for example, when someone completes high school (graduation ceremony) or becomes married (wedding ceremony). Look at the photos shown here. In each case, what do we learn about how the society defines the transition from one stage of life to another?

Among the Hamer people in the Omo Valley of Ethiopia, young boys must undergo a test to mark their transition to manhood. Usually the event is triggered by the boy’s expressing a desire to marry. In this ritual, witnessed by everyone in his society, the boy must jump over a line of bulls selected by the girl’s family. If he succeeds in doing this three times, he is declared a man and the wedding can take place (marking the girl’s transition to womanhood). Does our society have any ceremony or event similar to this to mark the transition to adulthood?

Hint  Societies differ in how they structure the life course, including which stages of life are defined as important, what years of life various stages correspond to, and how clearly movement from one stage to another is marked. Given our cultural emphasis on individual choice and freedom, many people tend to say “You’re only as old as you feel” and let people decide these things for themselves. When it comes to reaching adulthood, our society is not very clear—the box on page 111 points out many factors that figure into becoming an adult. So there is no widespread “adult ritual” as we see in these photos. Keep in mind that, for us, class matters a lot in this process, with young people from more affluent families staying in school and delaying full adulthood until well into their twenties or even their thirties. Finally, in these tough economic times, the share of young people in their twenties living with parents goes way up, which can delay adulthood for an entire cohort.
1. Across the United States, many families plan elaborate parties to celebrate a young person’s graduation from high school. In what respects is this event a ritual that symbolizes a person reaching adulthood? How does social class affect whether or not people define high school graduation as an achievement that marks the beginning of adulthood?

2. In the United States, when does the stage of life we call “old age” begin? Is there an event that marks the transition to old age? How does social class affect whether or not people define high school graduation as an achievement that marks the beginning of adulthood?

3. In what sense are human beings free? After reading through this chapter, develop a personal statement about the extent of human freedom. Some of the thinkers discussed in this chapter (such as Sigmund Freud) argued that there are sharp limits on our ability to act freely; by contrast, others (especially George Herbert Mead) claimed that human beings have significant ability to be creative. What is your personal statement about the extent of human freedom? Go to the "Seeing Sociology in YOUR Everyday Life" feature on mysoclab.com to learn more about the extent of personal freedom in society as well as suggestions about ways of making the most of the freedom we have.
What Is Socialization?

Socialization is a lifelong process.
- Socialization develops our humanity as well as our particular personalities.
- The importance of socialization is seen in the fact that extended periods of social isolation result in permanent damage (cases of Anna, Isabelle, and Genie).
- A century ago, most people thought human behavior resulted from biological instinct.
- For us as human beings, it is our nature to nurture.

Socialization is a matter of nurture rather than nature.
- Socialization is a lifelong process.
- The importance of socialization is seen in the fact that extended periods of social isolation result in permanent damage (cases of Anna, Isabelle, and Genie).
- Socialization is a matter of nurture rather than nature.
- A century ago, most people thought human behavior resulted from biological instinct.
- For us as human beings, it is our nature to nurture.

Important Contributions to Our Understanding of Socialization

Sigmund Freud's model of the human personality has three parts:
- **id**: innate, pleasure-seeking human drives
- **superego**: the demands of society in the form of internalized values and norms
- **ego**: our efforts to balance innate, pleasure-seeking drives and the demands of society

Jean Piaget believed that human development involves both biological maturation and gaining social experience. He identified four stages of cognitive development:
- The **sensorimotor stage** involves knowing the world only through the senses.
- The **preoperational stage** involves starting to use language and other symbols.
- The **concrete operational stage** allows individuals to understand causal connections.
- The **formal operational stage** involves abstract and critical thought.

Lawrence Kohlberg applied Piaget's approach to stages of moral development:
- We first judge rightness in **preconventional** terms, according to our individual needs.
- Next, **conventional** moral reasoning takes account of parental attitudes and cultural norms.
- Finally, **postconventional** reasoning allows us to criticize society itself.

Carol Gilligan found that gender plays an important part in moral development, with males relying more on abstract standards of rightness and females relying more on the effects of actions on relationships.

To George Herbert Mead:
- The **self** is part of our personality and includes self-awareness and self-image.
- The self develops only as a result of social experience.
- Social experience involves the exchange of symbols.
- Social interaction depends on understanding the intention of another, which requires taking the role of the other.
- Human action is partly spontaneous (the I) and partly in response to others (the me).
- We gain social experience through imitation, play, games, and understanding the **generalized other**.

Charles Horton Cooley used the term **looking-glass self** to explain that we see ourselves as we imagine others see us.

Erik H. Erikson identified challenges that individuals face at each stage of life from infancy to old age.

**id** (p. 104) Freud's term for the human being's basic drives
**ego** (p. 104) Freud's term for a person's conscious efforts to balance innate pleasure-seeking drives with the demands of society
**superego** (p. 105) Freud's term for the cultural values and norms internalized by an individual
**sensorimotor stage** (p. 105) Piaget's term for the level of human development at which individuals experience the world only through their senses
**preoperational stage** (p. 105) Piaget's term for the level of human development at which individuals first use language and other symbols
**concrete operational stage** (p. 105) Piaget's term for the level of human development at which individuals first see causal connections in their surroundings
**formal operational stage** (p. 105) Piaget's term for the level of human development at which individuals think abstractly and critically
**self** (p. 107) George Herbert Mead's term for the part of an individual's personality composed of self-awareness and self-image
**looking-glass self** (p. 108) Cooley's term for a self-image based on how we think others see us
**significant others** (p. 108) people, such as parents, who have special importance for socialization
**generalized other** (p. 108) George Herbert Mead's term for widespread cultural norms and values we use as references in evaluating ourselves
**Agents of Socialization**

The **family** is usually the first setting of socialization.
- Family has the greatest impact on attitudes and behavior.
- A family’s social position, including race and social class, shapes a child’s personality.
- Ideas about gender are learned first in the family.

**Schools** give most children their first experience with bureaucracy and impersonal evaluation.
- Schools teach knowledge and skills needed for later life.
- Schools expose children to greater social diversity.
- Schools reinforce ideas about gender.

The **peer group** helps shape attitudes and behavior.
- The peer group takes on great importance during adolescence.
- The peer group frees young people from adult supervision.

The **mass media** have a huge impact on socialization in modern, high-income societies.
- The average U.S. child spends as much time watching television and videos as attending school and interacting with parents.
- The mass media often reinforce stereotypes about gender and race.
- The mass media expose people to a great deal of violence.

**Socialization and the Life Course**

The concept of **childhood** is grounded not in biology but in culture. In high-income countries, childhood is extended.

The emotional and social turmoil of **adolescence** results from cultural inconsistency in defining people who are not children but not yet adults. Adolescence varies by social class.

**Adulthood** is the stage of life when most accomplishments take place. Although personality is now formed, it continues to change with new life experiences.

**Old age** is defined as much by culture as biology.
- Traditional societies give power and respect to elders.
- Industrial societies define elders as unimportant and out of touch.

Acceptance of **death and dying** is part of socialization for the elderly. This process typically involves five stages: denial, anger, negotiation, resignation, and acceptance.

**Total Institutions**

**Total institutions** include prisons, mental hospitals, and monasteries.
- Staff members supervise all aspects of life.
- Life is standardized, with all inmates following set rules and routines.

**Resocialization** is a two-part process:
- breaking down inmates’ existing identity
- building a new self through a system of rewards and punishments