Lecture Notes

# Chapter 4: Socialization: Becoming Human and Humane

## Learning Objectives

1. Summarize the nature versus nurture debate and the sociological perspective on it.
2. Predict the impact of isolation and neglect on children.
3. Defend the position that groups at each level in our social world have a stake in how we are socialized.
4. Describe how we develop a “self” through interacting with others.
5. Explain how micro- and meso-level agents of socialization can impact children today.
6. Identify policy questions that rely on an understanding of socialization.

## Chapter Overview

Chapter four addresses the complexities of socialization. The chapter begins by outlining the “nature versus nurture” argument, followed by addressing the importance of socialization for children. Next, micro-level socialization is explained, including the ideas of Cooley (the looking glass self) and Mead (role taking, the “I” and the “me”, and the stages in the development of the self.) Meso-level socialization is then addressed using the Iowa school’s idea of the “core self”. Socialization throughout the life cycle and resocialization are highlighted, which leads to a discussion of the agents of socialization. Finally, socialization is explained on the macro-level using transnationalism and the global society as examples.

## Lecture Outline

I. Introduction

A. *Socialization* – the lifelong process of learning to become a member of the social world

i. Family, education, religion, and other institutions all socialize us

ii. Necessary for the survival of individuals, groups, and society

B. *Interaction* – the basic building block of socialization through which a child is shaped into a human being, learns its culture, and becomes a member ofa society

C. *Social self* – the perceptions we have of who we are

II. Nature and Nurture

A. *Nature vs. nurture* – the debate over whether biology or socialization explains the development of the self and human social behaviors

B. *Sociobiology (evolutionary psychology)* – a theory that claims that our genetic makeup wires us for social behaviors

i. Altruistic behavior is explained because it results in an increased survival of the species

ii. *Reductionist theory* – a theory that reduces complex social behaviors to a single explanation

iii. Evidence suggests that many human behaviors are not genetic because if they were, behaviors should be the same across cultures

iv. Most sociologists believe that individuals are influenced by biology (which creates certain needs and drives) but that we primarily learn complex social arrangements

III. The Importance of Socialization

A. The extended period of dependency for human children allows them to learn the complexities of culture through human affection and interaction

B. Isolated and abused children who are denied this contact, they typically have developmental disorders that persist throughout their lifetimes

i. In comparing Anna and Isabelle, Kingsley Davis found that even minimal human contact made a difference in socialization

1. Anna – virtually no contact; discovered at age six but could not walk or talk, and learned little in a special school

2. Isabelle – isolated with her deaf-mute mother; discovered at age six; experienced challenges, but did learn to talk, play, and developed nearly normally intellectually

3. Orphaned children who are neglected or abused – experience similar delays

4. Children require basic needs, but also contact, affection, and interactions with others

IV. Socialization and the Social World

A. Most activities in life are a part of the socialization experience and teach us how to function in society

i. Micro-level – parents teach children; *peer groups –* members who are roughly equal in some status within society

ii. Meso-level – schools and religious denominations teach moral “truths”, knowledge, and skills

iii. Macro-level – nation-wide television ads encourage a certain lifestyle through consumerism

B. Organizations are dependent upon socialized people to help the groups survive and meet their goals

C. Structural-functionalist perspective – different levels of socializing agents operate to support each other

D. Conflict perspective – the links between various parts of the social world are competitive; those who have power use socialization to manipulate others into supporting the power structure and interests of the elite

i. Organizational goals are often in conflict with one another

ii. Organizations compete for our time and resources

iii. Most individuals have little power to control/decide their futures

V. Development of the Self: Micro-Level Analysis

A. The primary product of socialization is the self

i. *Self* – the perceptions we have of who we are which are developed from our perceptions of the way others respond to us

ii. The sense of self develops beginning in infancy and continuing throughout the life course; it emerges through interactions

iii. Biological and social characteristics both contribute to the development of the self

iv. Most sociologists believe the ability to develop the self and see it as an object is a uniquely human characteristic

B. The Looking Glass Self and Taking the Role of the Other

i. *The looking glass self* (Cooley) – we imagine how we appear to others, interpret how others judge that appearance and respond to that interpretation, and experience feelings of pride or shame based upon this imagined appearance and judgment, then respond based on our interpretation

1. We actively try to manipulate other’s views of us to serve our needs and interests

2. Our sense of self is influenced by our interpretations of how others react to us

ii. *Role-taking* (Mead) – imagining oneself in from the point of view of the other

1. Allows humans to see themselves as objects

2. Possible because humans can use and respond to symbols

a. *Symbols* – human creations like language and gestures that are used to represent actions or objects

3. Once a person can symbolically recognize objects, the self can be viewed as an object

4. This process begins with having a name that allows us to see ourselves as separate from other objects

5. Most sociologists think that only humans use symbols

a. Some animals use *signs* – an indication of some physical object or event is close at hand

iii. Symbolic interaction theory – we take the actions of ourselves and others into account and take mental notes accordingly

1. The self can be passive (developed by the way that others see us) and active (an initiator of action – an agent)

C. Parts of the Self (Mead)

i. *The “I” –* the spontaneous, unpredictable, impulsive part of the self that acts without considering possible social consequences

ii. *The “me” –* the part of the self that has learned the rules of society and attempts to channel the impulses of the “I” into socially acceptable behavior that still meets the needs of the “I”

1. The “me” requires the ability to take the role of the other

D. Stages in the Development of the Self (Mead)

i. *Play stage* – children actually take on the role of someone else

1. Can only take on roles they have seen or are familiar with (particular others)

a. *Significant others* – people primary to us and who we have sustained interactions with

2. During this stage, children do not understand the complex relationships outside of the immediate family

ii. *Game stage* – the child can take the role of multiple others at once

1. Understand interdependence of roles (and the generalized other)

a. *Generalized other* – a composite of societal expectations

2. Able to play complex games because understand what several people expect simultaneously

3. One sign that the generalized other has been internalized is the experience of embarrassment since we can now see ourselves as objects from the standpoint of others

VI. The Self and Connections to the Meso-Level

A. The Iowa School

i. To a large extent, our sense of self is defined by our social positions within organizations and institutions in society

ii. The self is relatively stable because a core self develops

1. *Core self* – a stable inner sense of who we are regardless of our immediate setting; often centers on our most important social positions in the larger society

iii. Because those organizations are so important to our core self, we have a vested interest in their preservation

iv. Individuals create organizations and institutions, and those social structures take on an independent existence that affects individual actions and thoughts

VII. Socialization Throughout the Life Cycle

A. *Rites of passage* – celebrations or public recognitions when individuals shift from one status to another

i. Important because they impact how others perceive the individual, how the individual perceives herself, and the expectations of the individual

ii. Infant – birth (begins the socialization process)

iii. Childhood – first day of school (expands the social world)

iv. Adolescence – not a universal stage in the life cycle

1. Can lead to identity crisis since there is no clear rite of passage

2. At age 18, most U.S. adolescents’ lives are increasingly influenced by macro-level forces

v. Adulthood – graduation, acceptance of the first job, and marriage

vi. Middle years of adulthood – presumed midlife crisis (the current generation in middle adulthood has lived through numerous social changes)

vii. Retired and elderly – differs based on the society, but in Western societies this can be a difficult transition as retired persons try to figure out their new roles

1. Problems can result from a lack of valued roles and socialization into new roles, including dependency, poverty, and ill health

2. Continued involvement in society helps increase respect for the elderly, and allows the elderly to have a more positive self image

viii. Death and dying – cultural and personal beliefs about the meaning of death impact how people cope with death and dying

1. Death ends the process of socialization

B. The Process of Resocialization

i. *Resocialization* – the process of abandoning one or more social positions in favor of others that are more suitable for a newly acquired status

ii. Often associated with major life changes in adulthood

iii. Can be voluntary (such as adjusting to widowhood) or forced (such as being resocialized to prison life)

iv. Undoing prior socialization can be very difficult, and relapsing to old behaviors is common

VIII. Agents of Socialization: The Micro-Meso Connection

A. *Agents of socialization* – the people, organizations, and institutions who transmit culture and teach us who we are and how to thrive in our social world

B. Agents are the mechanism through which the self learns the beliefs, values, and behaviors of the culture

C. Family, peers, and local groups are micro-level agents of socialization

D. Education, religion, and politics are examples of meso-level agents

E. The importance of various agents changes over the life course

i. Parents are the primary agents in childhood

ii. Peer groups become more important during the teen years

iii. Meso-level institutions become more important as people mature

F. Different agents sometimes present different messages

i. *Formal agents* – agents whose goal is socialization (e.g., parents)

ii. *Informal agents* – agents who do not have the goal (e.g., the media)

G. Families: Micro-Level Socializing Agents

i. Families teach right and wrong through the use of sanctions

1. *Negative sanctions* – punishment for undesirable behavior

2. *Positive sanctions* – rewards for desirable behavior

ii. The amount and type of sanctions by the family influence the socialization process and the development of the self

iii. Family socialization varies by culture

iv. The number and placement of children within the family can influence their individual socializations

H. Social Class: Meso-level Socialization

i. *Social class* – the wealth, power, and prestige rankings individuals hold in society

ii. Socialization varies by social class; the distribution of resources impact who we become

iii. Parents tend to teach their children how to succeed within their social class and to meet the expectations for adults of that class

iv. Socialization is different across sex and parenting styles as well

I. Electronic Media: Meso-Level Agents within the Home

i. Television and computers are in most American homes

ii. Over 80 % of children under 5 use the Internet weekly

iii. Internet socialization can play a role in radicalizing young people and involving them in terrorism

iv. Increase in the use of tablets by children under the age of 9

v. Children in the United States spend more time watching television than any other waking activity

vi. Many are concerned about the socialization messages children receive from television and computer games, and the behaviors that result from those messages

1. Children are affected negatively from excessive television (especially television violence)

2. It is difficult to establish a direct causal link between TV viewing and behavior

3. Children spend more time with television and computer games than parents or peers, which could radically alter socialization

IX. Socialization and Macro-Level Issues

A. Heterogeneous Societies, and Sense of Self versus “Other”

i. *Transnationalism* – the new phenomenon resulting from immigration of families or individuals who have national loyalty to more than one country

1. They receive multiple messages about appropriate behaviors and obligations

ii. Even those who do not migrate may experience global pressures because of the connection with others possible because of the internet

1. Failure to acknowledge and respect people from other groups can result in alienation of those who are not like us, and make us less competitive in a global environment

2. Some global events (like terrorism) can cause us to be less tolerant and more defensively isolated

iii. Access to international information and friendships across borders and boundaries are increasingly possible as more people have access to the Internet

iv. One interesting question is how access or lack of access will influence the strength of “we” versus “they feelings”

v. Children in the 21st century are being socialized to live in a globalized world

B. Global Events and Personal Identity

i. Sometimes, global events can cause a different turn away from tolerance and toward defensive isolation

ii. The only thing we can predict with considerable certainty is that in this age of sharing a small planet, the socialization of our citizens will be influenced by events at the macro-level, whether national or global

X. What Have We Learned?

A. Human socialization is pervasive, extensive, and lifelong

B. We cannot understand what it means to be human without comprehending the impact of a specific culture on us, the influence of our close associates, and the complex interplay of pressures from micro-, meso-, and macro-levels