

Becoming the person you are cannot be separated from the people, historical events, and social circumstances that surround you. In this chapter, I examine the process of socialization—how we learn what's expected of us in our families, our communities, and our culture and how we learn to behave according to those expectations. The primary focus will be on the development of identity. **Identity** is our most essential and personal characteristic. It consists of our membership in various social groups (race, ethnicity, religion, gender, etc.), the traits we show to others, and the traits they ascribe to us. Our identity locates us in the social world, thoroughly affecting everything we do, feel, say, and think in our lives. Most people tend to believe that our self-concept, our sense of “maleness” or “femaleness,” and our racial and ethnic identities are biologically or psychologically determined and therefore permanent and unchangeable. But as you will discover, these characteristics are social constructions: as much a product of our social setting and the significant people in our lives as a product of our physical traits and innate predispositions.

GENES, SOCIAL STRUCTURE, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF HUMAN BEINGS

The question of how we become who we are has for centuries occupied the attention of biologists, psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers, poets, and novelists. The issue is often framed as a debate between *nature* (we are who we are because we were born that way) and *nurture* (we are who we are because of the way we were treated while growing up). Are we simply the predetermined product of our genes and biochemistry, or are we “created” from scratch by the individuals and social institutions that surround us?

The answer to this question swings back and forth depending on the dominant cultural mood. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, genetic inheritance was a popular explanation for human behavior, including a host of social problems ranging from poverty and crime to alcoholism and mental deficiency. Scientists, borrowing from the selective breeding practices used with thoroughbred racehorses and livestock, advocated programs of **eugenics**, or controlled mating, to produce “better” citizens and to ensure that the “defective” genes of troublesome individuals would not be passed on to future generations. These ideas were put into practice largely through programs of forced sterilization. Similar theories of genetic superiority and inferiority became the cornerstone of Adolf Hitler's horrors in Nazi Germany during World War II. After the war, most people wanted to get as far away from such “nature” arguments as possible. So in the 1950s and 1960s, scholars heavily emphasized environmental influences on behavior, especially the role of early family experiences in shaping children's future personalities (Gould, 1997).

Today, because of the high regard for scientific technology, genetic explanations of human behavior have again become fashionable. In recent years, researchers have claimed that such diverse social phenomena as shyness, impulsiveness, intelligence, aggression, obesity, alcoholism, hoarding, and addiction to gambling are at least partly due to heredity. An economist raised eyebrows recently when he argued in his book that because of the power of genetic inheritance, parenting hardly matters. Children's destiny is pretty much genetically predetermined. Healthy, smart, happy, virtuous parents tend to have matching offspring no matter what they do to and for their children. So, he wrote, they should just relax and let their children do, essentially, what they want (B. Caplan, 2011). Similarly, the authors of the best-selling book *Freakonomics* wrote, “It isn't so much a matter of what you do as a parent; it's who you are (Levitt & Dubner, 2009, p. 175). Advances in genetic testing technology, like the Human Genome Project—an undertaking, completed in 2003, that mapped all the 20,000 to 25,000 genes in human DNA—and a recently developed technique that uses only a blood sample

from a pregnant mother and saliva from the father to map the entire genetic configuration of a fetus (and thereby detect thousands of diseases prenatally; Pollack, 2012) will no doubt add fuel to “nature” arguments in the years to come.

Yet apparently we’re not quite ready to say that nurture plays no role. In 2011, a prominent Yale law professor struck a blow for the environmental influence on kids’ development when she argued in a popular book that the educational success of Asian children is due largely to the heavy-handed role of mothers, whom she refers to as “Tiger Mothers.” She recommended—to all parents, no matter what their ethnic backgrounds—that the prescription for a successful child consists of stressing academic performance, never accepting a mediocre grade, insisting on drilling and practice, and instilling unwavering respect for authority (Chua, 2011). Some affluent parents have even gone so far as to move to another country for a year so their children can be immersed in another culture and become cultivated, global citizens (L. Miller, 2011).

Indeed, when it comes to certain traits, heredity is meaningful only in the context of social experiences. Take intelligence. Many geneticists argue that heredity determines the limits of intelligence (Kirp, 2006). They base this claim on studies that have found that differences in IQ scores between identical twins (who share all their genes) are smaller than differences between fraternal twins (who share only half their genes). But it’s impossible to understand intelligence without examining how our genetic makeup interacts with our social experiences. As one author put it,

You’ve got genes that are going to give you a certain range of height, or a certain range in the color of your eyes, and a certain range of your intelligence. But we can’t say that there’s this separate nature that just does its thing separately from nurture. The genes literally do come first, but the way the genes act, their influence, actually doesn’t take place before they interact with their environment. Everything is dependent on this interaction. (Shenk, 2010, p. 44)

Other researchers have found that children’s socioeconomic environment can make an enormous difference in their intellectual development. One study of 7-year-olds found that while genetics accounts for most of the variation in IQ scores among twins with wealthy parents, the opposite is the case for twins from impoverished families. In these families, the IQs of identical twins vary just as much as the IQs of fraternal twins (Turkheimer, Haley, Waldron, D’Onofrio, & Gottesman, 2003). The researchers conclude that home life is critical. In a poor and unstable home environment, children’s genetic potential cannot be reached. Conversely, affluent families are better equipped to provide the cognitive stimulation needed for neurological development.

As you might suspect, most sociologists would argue that human beings are much more than a collection of genetic predispositions and biological traits. But that doesn’t mean that nature is completely irrelevant. Certainly, our outward appearance, our physical strength, and our inherited susceptibility to sickness have some effect on our personal development. Furthermore, our every thought and action is the result of a complex series of neurological and electrochemical events in our brains and bodies. When we feel the need to eat we are reacting to a physiological sensation—stomach contractions—brought about by a lowering of blood sugar. Satisfying hunger is clearly a biological process. But the way we react to this sensation cannot be predicted by physiology alone. What, when, how, and how often we eat are all matters of cultural forces that we learn over time. When you say something like, “I’m starving, but it’s too early to eat dinner,” you’re signaling the power of cultural training in overriding physical demands.

Likewise, society can magnify genetic and physical differences or cover them up. We’ve collectively decided that some differences are socially irrelevant (e.g., eye color) and that some are important

enough to be embedded in our most important social institutions (e.g., sex and skin color), giving rise to different rights, duties, expectations, and access to educational, economic, and political opportunities.

The relatively new field of *epigenetics* focuses on how gene expression or suppression is dictated by environmental influences. The life we lead and the world we live in can therefore be just as powerful as our genetic code in the development of temperament, body shape, and predisposition to disease (Shulevitz, 2012). So while our genes may have a role to play in who we become, the behaviors and attitudes of significant people in our lives and the cultural and institutional forces that structure our lives are just as, if not more, important (Eliot, 2010). As these things change, so do we. This proposition is not altogether comforting. It implies that who we are may in some ways be “accidental,” the result of a series of social coincidences, chance encounters, decisions made by others, and political, economic, and historical events that are in large measure beyond our control—like growing up in California rather than Texas.

SOCIALIZATION: BECOMING YOU

The structural-functionalist perspective reminds us that the fundamental task of any society is to reproduce itself—to create members whose behaviors, desires, and goals correspond to those that particular society deems appropriate and desirable. Through the powerful and ubiquitous process of **socialization**, the needs of the society become the needs of the individual.

Socialization is a process of learning. To be socialized is to be trained to think and behave appropriately. It is the means by which people acquire a vast array of important social skills, such as driving a car, converting fractions into decimals, speaking the language correctly, or using a fork instead of a knife to eat peas. But socialization is also the way we learn how to perceive our world; how to interact with others; what it means to be male or female; how, when, why, and with whom to be sexual; what we should and shouldn't do to and for others under certain circumstances; what our society defines as moral and immoral; and so on. In short, it is the process by which we internalize all the cultural information I discussed in Chapter 4.

This learning process is carried out by the various individuals, groups, organizations, and institutions a person comes into contact with during the course of his or her life. These entities—whom sociologists refer to as **agents of socialization**—can be family, friends, peers, teammates, teachers, schools, religious institutions, and the media. They can influence our self-concepts, attitudes, tastes, values, emotions, and behavior.

Although socialization occurs throughout our lives, the basic, formative instruction of life begins early on. Young children must be taught the fundamental values, knowledge, and beliefs of their culture. Some of the socialization that occurs during childhood—often called **anticipatory socialization**—is the primary means by which young individuals acquire the values and orientations found in the statuses they will likely enter in the future (Merton, 1957). Household chores, a childhood job, organized sports, dance lessons, dating, and many other types of experiences give youngsters an opportunity to rehearse for the kinds of roles that await them in adulthood.

The Acquisition of Self

The most important outcome of the socialization process is the development of a sense of self. The term **self** refers to the unique traits, behaviors, and attitudes that distinguish one person from the next. The self is both the active source of behavior and its passive object (Mead, 1934).

As an active source, the self can initiate action, which is frequently directed toward others. Imagine, for example, that Donna and Robert are having dinner in a restaurant. Donna has a self that can perceive Robert, talk to him, evaluate him, tell him what to order, and maybe even try to persuade him to act in a way that is consistent with her interests. At the same time, Donna has a self that is a potential object of others' behavior: She can be perceived, talked to, evaluated, directed, or persuaded by Robert.

Donna can also direct these activities toward herself. She can perceive, evaluate, motivate, and even talk to herself. This is called **reflexive behavior**. To have a self is to have the ability to plan, observe, guide, and respond to one's own actions (Mead, 1934). Think of all the times you have tried to motivate yourself to act by saying something such as, "All right, if I read 20 more pages of my boring sociology book, I'll make myself a hot fudge sundae" or, "I won't post a photo of the latest disgusting meal in the campus cafeteria on Instagram until I write five more pages of this chemistry paper." To engage in such activities, you must simultaneously be the motivator and the one being motivated—the seer and the seen.

At this very moment, you are initiating an action: reading this remarkably nonboring sociology book. But you also have the ability (now that I've mentioned it!) to be aware of your reading behavior, to reflexively observe yourself reading, and even to evaluate how well you are doing. This may sound like some sort of mystical out-of-body experience, but it isn't. Nothing is more fundamental to human thought and action than this capacity for reflexive self-awareness. It allows us to control our own behavior and interact smoothly with other self-aware individuals.

At birth, human babies have no sense of self. This is not to say that infants don't act on their own. Anyone who has been around babies knows that they have a tremendous ability to initiate action, ranging all the way from photo-worthy cute to downright repulsive. They cry, eat, sleep, play with squeaky rubber toys, and eliminate waste, all with exquisite flair and regularity. From the very first days of life, they respond to the sounds, sights, smells, and touches of others.

But this behavior is not characterized by the sort of reflexive self-awareness that characterizes later behavior. Babies don't say to themselves, "I wonder if Mom will feed me if I increase the volume of my crying to 'scream' level" or "I can't *believe* how funny my babbling sounds right now." As children grow older, though, they begin to exert greater control over their actions. Part of this transformation is biological. As they mature, they become more adept at muscle control. But physical development is only part of the picture. Humans must acquire certain cognitive capacities through interactions with others, including the abilities to differentiate between self and others, to understand and use symbolic language, and to take the roles of others.

The Differentiation of Self To distinguish between yourself and others, you must at minimum be able to recognize yourself as a distinct being (Mead, 1934). The first step in the acquisition of self, then, is learning to distinguish our own faces and bodies from the rest of the physical environment. Surprisingly, we don't have this ability at birth. Not only are newborns incapable of recognizing themselves, but they also cannot discriminate the boundaries between their bodies and the bodies of others. Infants will pull their own hair to the point of excruciating pain but aren't yet able to realize that the hair they're pulling with their hands and the hair that they feel being pulled out of their heads is the same hair.

With cognitive growth and social experience, infants gradually recognize themselves as unique physical objects. Most studies in this area indicate that children usually develop this ability at about 18 months (Bertenthal & Fischer, 1978). There's a quick way to tell if a child has reached this stage: the mirror test. Make a large mark on a baby's forehead with a washable marker and hold the

youngster up to a mirror. If the child reaches up to wipe away the smudge, you can be reasonably sure she or he recognizes that the image in the mirror is her or his own.

Language Acquisition and the Looking-Glass Self The next important step in the acquisition of self is the development of speech (Hewitt, 1988). Symbolic interactionism points out that mastery of language is crucial in children's efforts to differentiate themselves as distinct social as well as physical objects (Denzin, 1977). Certainly, language acquisition relies on neurological development. But the ability to grasp the nuances of one's own language requires input from others. Most parents talk to their children from the start. Gradually, children learn to make sounds, imitate sounds, and use sounds as symbols for particular physical sensations or objects. Children learn that the sounds "Mama" and "Dada" are associated with two important objects in their life. Soon children learn that other objects—toys, animals, foods, Aunt Anita, Uncle Marc—have unique sounds associated with them as well.

This learning process gives the child access to the preexisting linguistic world in which his or her parents and others live (Hewitt, 1988). The objects named are not only those recognized within the larger culture but also those recognized within the child's family and social groups. The child learns the names of concrete objects (balls, buildings, furniture) as well as abstractions that cannot be directly perceived (God, happiness, peace, idea).

By learning that people and other objects have names, the child also begins to learn that these objects can be related to one another in a variety of ways. Depending on who is talking to whom, the same person can be called several different names. The object "Dad" is called "David," "Dave," "Dov," "Dr. Newman," "Professor Newman," "Mr. Newman," and "Noooo-man" by various other people. Furthermore, the child learns that different people can be referred to by the same name. All those other toddlers playing in the park have someone they also call "Mama."

Amid these monumental discoveries, young children learn that they too are objects that have names. A child who learns that others are referring to her when they make the sound "Emma," and that she too can use "Emma" to refer to herself, has taken a significant leap forward in the acquisition of self. The child now can visualize herself as a part of the named world and the named relationships to which she belongs.

The self that initially emerges from this process is a rather simple one. "Emma" is just a name associated with a body. A more sophisticated sense of self is derived from the child's ability to learn the meaning of this named object.

Children learn not only the names of objects but their meaning in social life by observing the way other people act toward those objects. By witnessing people sitting on a chair, a child learns what *chair* means. Parental warnings allow them to learn that a *hot stove* is something to be avoided. Similarly, by observing how people act toward them, they learn the meaning of themselves. People treat children in a variety of ways: care for them, punish them, love them, neglect them, teach them. If parents, relatives, and other agents of socialization perceive a child as smart, they will act toward her or him that way. Thus, the child eventually comes to define herself or himself as a smart person. One of the earliest symbolic interactionists, Charles Horton Cooley (1902), referred to this process as the acquisition of the **looking-glass self**. He argued that we use the reaction of others toward us as looking glasses (that is, mirrors) in which we see ourselves and determine our self-worth. Through this process, we imagine how we might look to other people, we interpret their responses to us, and we form a self-concept. If we think people perceive us favorably, we're likely to develop a positive self-concept. Conversely, if we detect unfavorable reactions, our self-concept will likely be negative. Hence, self-evaluative feelings like pride or shame are always the product of the reflected appraisals of others.

But the development of a self-concept is not just a function of an individual's traits and experiences. How the child-as-named-object is defined by others is also linked to larger societal considerations. Every culture has its own way of defining and valuing individuals at various stages of the life cycle. Children are not always defined, and have not always been defined, as a special subpopulation whose innocence requires nurturing and protection (Ariès, 1962). In some societies, they are expected to behave like adults and are held accountable for their actions just as adults would be. Under such cultural circumstances, a 5-year-old's self-concept may be derived from how well he or she contributes economically to the family, not from how cute or playful he or she is. Moreover, every society has its own standards of beauty and success. If thinness is a culturally desirable characteristic, a thin child is more likely to garner positive responses and develop a positive self-image than a child who violates this norm (i.e., an obese child).

The Development of Role Taking The socialization process would be pretty simple if everyone in our lives saw us in exactly the same way. But different people expect or desire different things from us. Children eventually learn to modify their behavior to suit a variety of others. Four-year-old Ahmed learns, for instance, that his 3-year-old sister loves it when he sticks his thumb up his nose, but he also knows that his father doesn't find this behavior at all amusing. So Ahmed will avoid such conduct when his father is around but proceed to amuse his sister with this trick when Papa is gone. The ability to use other people's perspectives and expectations in formulating one's own behavior is called **role taking** (Mead, 1934).

Role taking ability develops gradually, paralleling the increasing maturation of linguistic abilities. Operating from the symbolic interactionist perspective, George Herbert Mead (1934) identified two major stages in the development of role taking ability and, ultimately, in the socialization of the self: the play stage and the game stage. The **play stage** occurs when children are just beginning to hone their language skills. Role taking at the play stage is quite simple in form, limited to taking the perspective of one other person at a time. Very young children cannot yet see themselves from different perspectives simultaneously. They have no idea that certain behaviors may be unacceptable to a variety of people across a range of situations. They know only that this particular person who is in their immediate presence will approve or disapprove of this particular act. Children cannot see that their father's displeasure with public nose picking reflects the attitudes of a larger group and is always unacceptable no matter where or when it takes place. This more sophisticated form of self-control develops at the next stage of the socialization process: the game stage.

The **game stage** occurs about the time when children first begin to participate in organized activities such as school events and team sports. The difference between role taking at the play and game stages parallels the difference between childhood play and game behavior. "Play" is not guided by a specific set of rules. It has no ultimate object, no clearly organized competition, and no winners and losers. Children playing baseball at the play stage have no sense of strategy and may not even be aware of the rules and object of the game. They may be able to hit, catch, and throw the ball but have no idea how their behavior is linked to that of their teammates. If a little girl is playing shortstop and a ground ball is hit to her, she may turn around and throw the ball to the left fielder, not because it will help her team win the game but because that's where her best friend happens to be.

Game behavior, in contrast, requires that children understand the object of the game. They realize that each player on the team is part of an organized network of roles determined by the rules of the game. Children know they must continually adapt their behavior to the team's needs in order to achieve a goal. To do so, they must imagine the group's perspective and anticipate how both their teammates and their opponents will act under certain circumstances. Now our little shortstop will throw the ball to

first base to get the batter out, but only after assessing how many outs there are and checking to make sure the opposing runner on second base is not trying to advance to third. It doesn't matter whether she likes or hates the first baseman; her team's success depends on her making this play.

With regard to role taking at the game stage, not only does the child learn to respond to the demands of several people, but she or he can also respond to the demands of the community or even society as a whole. Sociologists call the perspective of society and its constituent values and attitudes the *generalized other*. The generalized other becomes larger as a child matures, growing to include family, peer group, school, and finally the larger social community. "Dad doesn't like it when I take off my pants in a restaurant" (play stage) eventually becomes "It's never acceptable to take off one's pants in public" (game stage). Notice how such an understanding requires an ability to generalize behavior across a variety of situations and audiences. The child realizes that "public" consists of restaurants, shopping malls, school classrooms, parks, neighbors' living rooms, and so forth.

This ability is crucial because it enables the individual to resist the influence of specific people who happen to be in his or her immediate presence. The boy who defies his peers by not joining them in an act of petty shoplifting is showing the power of the generalized other ("Stealing, no matter where or with whom, is bad"). During the game stage, the attitudes and expectations of the generalized other are incorporated into one's values and self-concept.

Real life is not always that simple, though. Sometimes people succumb to the pressures of particular others and engage in behaviors they know are socially unacceptable. Furthermore, individuals from markedly different backgrounds are likely to internalize different sets of group attitudes and values. A devout Catholic contemplating divorce, for instance, is taking the role of a different generalized other than an atheist contemplating divorce. Likewise, the social worlds and social standards of men and women are different, as are those of children and adults, parents and nonparents, middle-class and working-class people, and people who grew up in different cultures.

Nor is role taking ability static. It changes in response to interactions with others. When people feel that they can understand another person's perspective—say, that of an intimate partner—they are likely to become concerned about or at least aware of how their behavior will affect that other person (Cast, 2004). Furthermore, as we move from one institutional setting to another, we adopt the perspective of the appropriate group and can become, for all intents and purposes, a different person. At school we behave one way, at church another, and at Grandma's house still another. We are as many different people as there are groups and organizations to which we belong.

Common sense suggests that people who have the most knowledge and experience should be the best role takers. For example, parents should be more sensitive to their children's views than vice versa, because they are older and wiser and were children once themselves. However, people in superior positions pay very little attention to those with little power. They actually tend to be less empathetic and sensitive because they don't have to be. As a result they feel no need to conform their behavior to the wishes and desires of their subordinates (Goleman, 2013; Tsushima & Gecas, 2001). One recent study found that members of the lower classes are more adept at identifying the emotions of others than those in the upper class (Kraus, Côté, & Keltner, 2010).

You can see this phenomenon in many other areas of social life. Younger siblings, for instance, are typically more aware of the actions and interests of their older siblings than vice versa. Low-level employees must be sensitive to the behaviors and preferences of those above them if they want to achieve occupational success and mobility. On a broader scale, less powerful nations must have heightened sensitivity to the activities of their more powerful neighbors. I have heard some Canadians complain that they are expected to know virtually everything about the United States—its culture, its geography, its economic and political systems—whereas most people in the United States tend to be

rather oblivious to even the most accessible elements of Canadian politics and culture, like the name of the prime minister or the provincial capital of Nova Scotia.

In sum, the ability to imagine another person's attitudes and intentions and thereby to anticipate that person's behavior is essential for everyday social interaction. Through role taking, we can envision how others perceive us and imagine what their response may be to some action we're contemplating. Hence, we can select behaviors that are likely to meet with the approval of the person or persons with whom we are interacting and can avoid behaviors that might meet with their disapproval. Role taking is thus a crucial component of self-control and social order. It transforms a biological being into a social being who is capable of conforming her or his behavior to societal expectations. It is the means by which culture is incorporated into the self and makes group life possible (Cast, 2004).

Resocialization

Socialization does not end when childhood ends; it continues throughout our lives. Adults must be **resocialized** into a new set of norms, values, and expectations each time they leave behind old social contexts or roles and enter new ones (Ebaugh, 1988; Pescosolido, 1986; Simpson, 1979). For instance, we have to learn how to think and act like a spouse when we marry (P. L. Berger & Kellner, 1964), like a parent when we have kids (A. Rossi, 1968), and like a divorced person when a marriage ends (Vaughan, 1986). Every new group or organization we enter, every new friendship we form, every new life-changing experience we have requires the formation of new identities and socialization into new sets of norms and beliefs.

Certain occupations require the formal resocialization of new entrants. Often, the purpose is simply to make sure people who work in the organization share the same professional values, methods, and vocabulary. Many large companies, for example, have orientation programs for new employees to teach them what will be expected of them as they begin their new jobs. Sometimes the purpose is to make new entrants abandon their original expectations and adopt a more realistic view of the occupation. Police recruits who believe their job is to protect people must learn that deadly force is appropriate and sometimes necessary in the line of duty (Hunt, 1985). Medical students may become less idealistic and more realistic as they learn about the exhausting demands of their profession (Becker & Geer, 1958; Hafferty, 1991). Such resocialization is especially important in occupations that deal with highly emotional matters, like death.

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The Professional Resocialization of Funeral Directors

Funeral directors routinely deal with death and corpses. They are exposed to sights, smells, and sounds that most people have learned to find frightening or repulsive. And they must discuss cold, practical matters, such as prices and methods of payment, with grief-stricken clients without appearing callous. Thus, the occupational resocialization of funeral directors is as important as that in any other profession that deals with human tragedy (clergy, doctors, nurses, police detectives, etc.). But unlike these other professionals, for whom death is merely one aspect of the job, funeral directors exist solely for the purpose of dealing with death.

To study the process of becoming a funeral director, sociologist Spencer Cahill (1999) spent 5 months as a participant observer in a mortuary science program at a community college. In most states, funeral directors

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must complete an accredited program in mortuary science before getting their license to practice. Cahill regularly attended classes on topics such as health and sanitation science, psychology of grief, and embalming. He also talked informally with the other students and interviewed eight of them formally. What was especially unique about his research approach was that instead of taking the stance of the detached, objective researcher, Cahill incorporated his own feelings and emotional reactions into his analysis.

He found that the entire mortuary science education program serves to normalize the work, so that students become comfortable with death. Reminders of death are a constant presence. Nothing is hidden. For instance, all the classrooms contain some artifacts of death, such as refrigerated compartments that hold corpses, stainless steel embalming tables, and caskets. All the instructors Cahill observed spread their lecture notes on a body gurney, forgoing the traditional lectern and table. It was also common practice for instructors to leave the door open between the classroom and the embalming laboratory, allowing the lingering smell of decomposing bodies to drift into the classroom.

Because other students on campus tend to shun them, the mortuary science students often stick together, providing an almost constant network of support. From these casual interactions (as well as conversations with their instructors), these students learn an occupational language that communicates professional authority and calm composure toward things most of the public would find upsetting. For example, the students learn to see the corpse not as an individual person with a history and a family but as a series of technical puzzles and problems posed by the cause of death (e.g., ingested substances, chemical changes, injuries sustained before death).

However, Cahill points out that professional socialization is not enough to create funeral directors. He notes that students for whom death has always been a mystery or students who are predisposed to becoming queasy don't last very long in the program. In contrast, those who are familiar with death or who have somehow worked with the dead before (such as the sons or daughters of funeral directors) are the most likely to succeed.

Eventually, the mortuary science students who complete the program adopt the identity of funeral director. They learn to normalize death and acquire the perceptions, judgments, and emotional management skills required of this occupation.

As one well-socialized student put it, "What we do is far less depressing than what nurses and doctors do. We only get the body after the death and do not have to watch all the suffering" (quoted in Cahill, 1999, p. 109).

Sometimes resocialization is forceful and intense. According to sociologist Erving Goffman, this type of resocialization often occurs in *total institutions* (E. Goffman, 1961). Total institutions are physical settings in which groups of individuals are separated from the broader society and forced to lead an enclosed, formally administered life. Prisons, mental hospitals, monasteries, and military training camps are examples of total institutions. In these locations, previous socialization experiences are systematically destroyed and new ones developed to serve the interests of the larger group. Take military boot camp, for example. The Army alone spends several billion dollars a year and employs thousands of people to turn civilians into battle-ready warriors who look, act, and think like soldiers and learn to see the world from the soldier's perspective (Tietz, 2006). The process is called "total control." To aid in this transformation, recruits are stripped of old civilian identity markers (clothes, personal possessions, hairstyle) and forced to take on new ones that nullify individuality and also identify the newcomers' subordinate status (uniforms, identification numbers, similar haircuts). The newcomer is also subjected to constant scrutiny. Conformity is mandatory. Any misstep is met with punishment or humiliation. Eventually, the individual learns to identify with the ideology of the total institution.

In the boot camp, the uniformity of values and appearance is intended to create a sense of solidarity among the soldiers and thereby make the military more effective in carrying out its tasks. Part of the reason for all the controversy over diversity in the military—first with the inclusion of African Americans, then with women, and now with gay men and lesbians—is that it introduces dissimilar beliefs, values, appearances, and lifestyles into a context where, from an institutional perspective, similarity is essential.

The Self in a Cultural Context

When we imagine how others will respond to our actions, we choose from a limited set of lines of conduct that are part of the wider culture. In the United States, the self is likely to incorporate key cultural virtues such as self-reliance and individualism. Hence, personal goals tend to be favored over group goals (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985). In the United States, people will readily change their group membership as it suits them—leaving one career for another, moving from neighborhood to neighborhood, switching political allegiances or even religions.

The United States is said to be an **individualist culture**, where personal traits and accomplishments are a key part of one's self-concept. We've always admired independent people whose success—usually measured in financial terms—is based on their own achievements and self-reliance (Bellah et al., 1985). Hence, the amount of respect people deserve is determined in large part by their level of individual expertise. For example, before a public speech, a guest lecturer in the United States will likely be introduced to her audience as “a distinguished scholar, a leader in her field” along with a list of academic credentials and scholarly achievements.

In many non-Western cultures, however, people are more likely to subordinate their individual goals to the goals of the larger group and to value obligations to others over personal achievements. In such a setting, known as a **collectivist culture**, personal identity is less important than group identity (Gergen, 1991). In India, for instance, feelings of self-esteem and prestige originate more from the reputation and honor of one's family than from any individual attainments (Roland, 1988). In a collectivist setting, high value is placed on preserving one's public image so as not to bring shame on one's family, tribe, or community (Triandis, McCusker, & Hui, 1990). Overcoming personal interests and temptations to show loyalty to one's group and other authorities is celebrated. Guest lecturers in a collectivist culture would be considered self-centered and egotistical if they mentioned their personal accomplishments and credentials. Japanese public speakers, for instance, commonly begin their lectures by telling the audience how *little* they know about the topic at hand (Goleman, 1990).

But even in an individualist society such as the United States, our personal identities are inseparable from the various groups and organizations to which we belong. Thus, to fully understand how we become who we are, we must know the norms and values of our culture, family, peers, coworkers, and all the other agents of socialization who are a part of our lives.

SOCIALIZATION AND STRATIFICATION: GROWING UP WITH INEQUALITY

Socialization does not take place in a vacuum. Your social class, your race and ethnicity, and your sex and gender all become significant features of your social identity. Were you born into a poor or a well-to-do family? Are you a member of a racial minority or a member of the dominant group? Are you male or female? These elements of identity shape your experiences with other people and the larger society and will direct you along a certain life path. In most societies, social class, race and ethnicity, and gender are the key determinants of people's opportunities throughout their lives.

Social Class

Social classes consist of people who occupy similar positions of power, privilege, and prestige. People's positions in the class system affect virtually every aspect of their lives, including political preferences, sexual behavior, religious affiliation, diet, and life expectancy. The conflict perspective points out that even in a relatively open society such as the United States, parents' social class determines children's access to certain educational, occupational, and residential opportunities. Affluent children grow up in more abundant surroundings than less affluent children and therefore have access to more material comforts and enriching opportunities such as good schools, chances to travel to far-off places, private music lessons, and so on. Furthermore, the lower the income of a child's family, the greater that child's risk of living in a single-parent household, having unemployed parents, having more than one disability, and dropping out of school (Mather & Adams, 2006).

But the relationship between class and socialization is not simply about parents' providing (or not providing) their children with the trappings of a comfortable childhood. Parents' class standing also influences the values and orientations children learn and the identities they develop.

In Chapter 10, you will learn much more about how social class affects attitudes, behaviors, and opportunities. The important point here is that social class and socialization are closely linked. Sociologist Melvin L. Kohn (1979) interviewed 200 working-class and 200 middle-class American couples who had at least one child of fifth-grade age. He found that the middle-class parents were more likely to promote values such as self-direction, independence, and curiosity than were the working-class parents. More recent studies have found that middle-class parents spend more time than working-class parents cultivating their children's language development (Hart & Risley, 1995). They're also more likely to foster their children's talents through organized leisure activities and logical reasoning (Lareau, 2003).

Conversely, working-class parents are more likely than middle-class parents to emphasize conformity to external authority, a common characteristic of the blue-collar jobs they're likely to have later on (M. L. Kohn, 1979). Principally, they want their children to be neat and clean and to follow the rules.

Of course, not all middle-class parents, or working-class parents, raise their children in these ways, and many factors other than social class influence parental values (J. D. Wright & Wright, 1976). Nevertheless, Kohn found that these general tendencies were consistent regardless of the sex of the child or the size and composition of the family. In a study of African American women, those from middle-class backgrounds reported that their parents had higher expectations of them and were more involved in their education than African American women from working-class backgrounds reported (N. E. Hill, 1997). Moreover, others have found that despite cultural differences, social class standing influences child socialization in societies in Europe (Poland, Germany) and Asia (Japan, Taiwan; Schooler, 1996; Williamson, 1984; Yi, Chang, & Chang, 2004).

Sudden shifts in social class standing—due, for instance, to an unexpected job loss—can also affect the way parents socialize their children. Parents who lose their jobs can become irritable, tense, and moody and their disciplinary style more arbitrary. They may come to rely less on reasoning and more on hostile comments and physical punishment. As a result, children's sense of self, their aspirations, and their school performance suffer (cited in Rothstein, 2001).

Class differences in socialization are also directly related to future goals. Working-class parents tend to believe that eventual occupational success and survival depend on their children's ability to conform to and obey authority (M. L. Kohn, 1979). Middle-class parents are likely to believe that their children's future success will result from assertiveness and initiative. Hence, middle-class children's feelings of control over their own destiny are likely to be much stronger than those of working-class children.

Race and Ethnicity

In 2015, as national attention focused on several high-profile incidents of young, unarmed black men being killed by white police officers, some of my students became embroiled in a heated discussion of the incidents. One student, who was white, expressed concern that because of the terrible actions of these individual officers, all police officers are going to be seen bad guys. Young children of all races would now grow up mistrusting or even hating the police. She talked about how, as a child, she had been taught that the role of the police is to help people and that if she were ever in trouble or lost she could approach an officer for assistance. She never questioned whether the police could be trusted.

Several of the African American students in class quickly pointed out that their socialization experiences had been quite different. Parents and others in their neighborhoods had taught them not to trust the police, because officers were just as likely to harass them as to help them: They were taught to seek out neighbors and relatives, not the police, if they ever needed assistance. To them, the police were not knights in shining armor but bullies with badges. Many parents and civic leaders feel it is essential to teach black and Latino/a children how to respond safely when approached by the police. The NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) has published a guide to interacting with law enforcement. Among other things, children are taught to speak when asked to speak, to stop when ordered to stop, to never make any sudden movements, and to always display their open hands to show they aren't armed (Barry, 2000). Former attorney general Eric Holder (who is black), talked publicly of a conversation he had with his teenage son about how he should interact with the police, what to say, and how to conduct himself if he was ever stopped or confronted in a way he thought was unwarranted (Franke-Ruta, 2013). Some black and Latino/a parents tell their children not to wear hoodies or baggy pants, fearing the lethal assumptions police might make (Eligon, 2013).

Although the two perspectives of my students are not representative of every white or every black person in the United States, the interchange illustrates the impact race and ethnicity can have on socialization. For white children, learning about their racial identity is less about defining their race than it is about learning how to handle the privileges and behaviors associated with being white in a predominantly white society (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). Chances are good that schools and religious organizations will reinforce the socialization messages expressed to white children in their families—for example, that “you can be anything you want as long as you work hard.”

For children who are members of ethnoracial minorities, however, learning about their race takes place in a different and much more complex social environment (Hughes & Chen, 1997). These children must live simultaneously in two different worlds: their family and ethnoracial community, which value them; and the “mainstream” (that is, white) society, which may not (Lesane-Brown, 2006). Hence, they're likely to be exposed to several different types of socialization experiences while growing up: those that include information about the mainstream culture, those that focus on their minority status in society, and those that focus on the history and cultural heritage of their ethnoracial group (L. D. Scott, 2003; Thornton, 1997). Parents often emphasize one type of orientation over others. In ethnoracial groups that have been able to overcome discrimination and achieve at high levels—such as some Asian American groups—ethnic socialization can focus simply on the values of their culture of origin. But among groups that by and large remain disadvantaged, such as African Americans, Native Americans, and Latino/as, parents' discussion of race is more likely to focus on preparing their children for prejudice, ethnic hatred, and mistreatment in a society set up to ignore or actively exclude them (McLoyd, Cauce, Takeuchi, & Wilson, 2000). For instance, these children may be taught that “hard work” alone may not be enough to get ahead in this society. Even African American children

from affluent homes in racially integrated neighborhoods need reassurances about the racial conflicts they will inevitably encounter. These are lessons that children in the dominant racial group seldom require, for reasons explored in greater depth in Chapter 11.

Gender

As you recall from Chapter 4, the sexual dichotomy—the assumption that there are two and only two sexes—is not universal. Cultures are even more likely to differ in what is expected of people based on their sex and in how male and female children are to be socialized.

Before discussing this aspect of socialization, it's necessary to distinguish between two concepts: sex and gender. **Sex** is typically used to refer to a person's biological maleness or femaleness. **Gender** designates masculinity and femininity: the psychological, social, and cultural aspects of maleness and femaleness (Kessler & McKenna, 1978). This distinction is important because it reminds us that male-female differences in behaviors or experiences do not spring naturally from biological differences between the sexes (Lips, 1993).

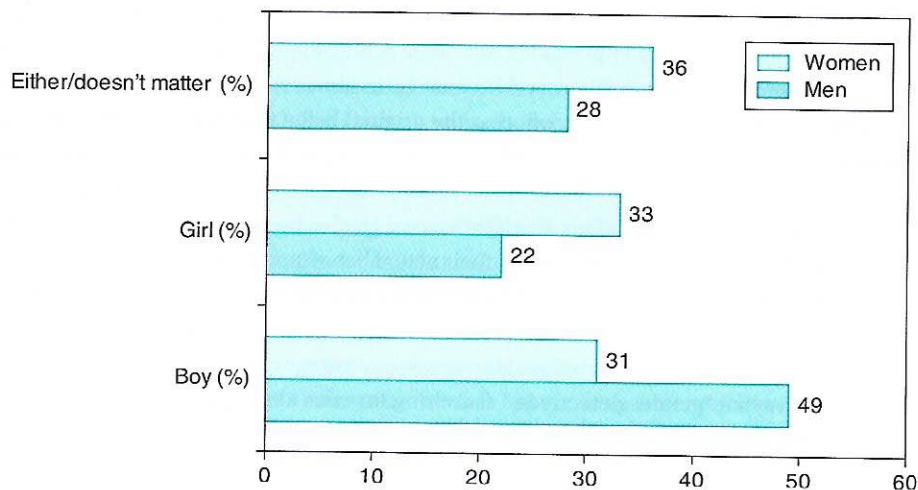
The gender socialization process begins the moment a child is born. A physician, nurse, or midwife immediately starts that infant on a career as a male or female by authoritatively declaring whether it is a boy or a girl. In most U.S. hospitals, the infant boy is wrapped in a blue blanket, the infant girl in a pink one. From that point on, the developmental paths of U.S. males and females diverge. The subsequent messages that individuals receive from families, books, television, and schools not only teach and reinforce gender-typed expectations but also influence the formation of their self-concepts.

If you were to ask soon-to-be parents whether they preferred sons or daughters or whether they intended to treat their babies differently depending on whether they are boys or girls, most would probably say no. Yet there is considerable evidence that what parents do and what they say they do are two different things (H. Lytton & Romney, 1991; McHale, Crouter, & Whiteman, 2003). This is especially true for fathers (see Exhibit 5.1). One study of pregnant women found that when they knew the sex of their fetus, they described the prenatal movements of their sons and daughters quite differently. Sons' movements were described with words like "vigorous" and "strong" while daughters' movements were described with terms like "not excessively energetic" or "not terribly active" (B. K. Rothman, 1988).

In another study, 30 first-time parents were asked to describe their infants at less than 24 hours old. They frequently resorted to common gender stereotypes. Those with daughters described them as "tiny," "soft," "fine featured," and "delicate." Sons were seen as "strong," "alert," "hardy," and "coordinated" (J. Z. Rubin, Provenzano, & Luria, 1974). A replication of this study two decades later found that U.S. parents continue to perceive their infants in gender-stereotyped ways, although less so than in the 1970s (Karraker, Vogel, & Lake, 1995). Parents also tend to engage in rougher physical play with infant sons than with infant daughters and use subtle differences in tone of voice and different pet names, such as "Sweetie" versus "Tiger" (MacDonald & Parke, 1986; Tauber, 1979).

Such differences are also reflected in the kinds of information parents seek *about* their children later on. A recent analysis of data from Google searches found that parents with daughters are significantly more likely to submit queries about their child's weight and physical attractiveness while parents with sons are more likely to search for information about whether their child has above average intelligence or shows signs of being a leader (Stephens-Davidowitz, 2014).

New parents can be very sensitive about the correct identification of their child's sex. Even parents who claim to consider sex and gender irrelevant may spend a great deal of time ensuring that their child has the culturally appropriate gender appearance. Parents of a girl baby who has yet to grow hair

EXHIBIT 5.1 Parental Gender Preference in the United States

SOURCE: Newport, 2011.

(a visible sign of gender in many cultures) will sometimes tape pink ribbons to their bald daughter's head to avoid potential misidentification. In many Latin American countries, families have infant girls' ears pierced and earrings placed in them to provide an unmistakable marker of the child's sex and gender.

In a culture where sex and gender are centrally important and any ambiguity is distasteful, the correct gender identification of babies maintains social order. When my elder son was an infant, I dressed him on several occasions in a pink, frilly snowsuit in order to observe the reactions of others. (Having a sociologist for a father can be rather difficult from time to time!) Inevitably, someone would approach us and start playing with the baby and some variation of the following interchange would ensue:

"Oh, she's so cute! What's your little girl's name?"

"Zachary."

"Isn't Zachary a boy's name?"

"He's a boy."

At this point, the responses would range from stunned confusion and awkward laughter to nasty looks and outright anger. Clearly, people felt that I had emotionally abused my son somehow. I had purposely breached a fundamental gender norm and thereby created, in their minds, unnecessary trauma (for him) and interactional confusion (for them).

Both boys and girls learn at a very young age to adopt gender as an organizing principle (Hollander, Renfrow, & Howard, 2011). Sometime between 18 and 24 months of age, most children develop the ability to label gender groups, use gender in their speech, and identify themselves as boys or girls (C. L. Martin & Ruble, 2009). To a young child, being a boy or a girl is simply another characteristic, like having brown hair or 10 fingers. The child at this age has no conception that gender is a category into which

every human can be placed (Kessler & McKenna, 1978). But by the age of 5 or so, most children have developed a fair number of gender stereotypes (for example, “boys like trucks” or “girls wear dresses”) that they then use to guide their own perceptions and activities (C. L. Martin & Ruble, 2009). They also use these stereotypes to form impressions of others. A boy, for instance, may avoid approaching a new girl who’s moved into the neighborhood because he assumes that she will only be interested in “girl” things. Acting on this assumption reinforces the original belief that boys and girls are different. Indeed, to children at this age, gender is typically seen as a characteristic that is fixed and permanent. Their views of gender differences reach their “peak rigidity” between 5 and 7 years of age (Trautner et al., 2005). A few years later, though, their attitudes toward gender become considerably more flexible, although such flexibility isn’t always reflected in their actual behaviors (C. L. Martin & Ruble, 2009).

It’s important to note that gender socialization is not a passive process in which children simply absorb the information that bombards them. As part of the process of finding meaning in their social worlds, children actively construct gender as a social category (Liben & Bigler, 2002). From an early age, they are like “gender detectives,” searching for cues about gender, such as who should and shouldn’t engage in certain activities, who can play with whom, and why girls and boys differ (C. L. Martin & Ruble, 2004, p. 67).

Parents and other family members sometimes provide children with explicit instructions on proper gender behavior, such as “Big boys don’t cry” or “Act like a young lady.” More commonly, though, such instruction is more subtle. Decades’ worth of research shows that parents speak differently to and play differently with their sons and daughters, often without realizing it. For instance, one study of mothers’ reactions to their children’s misbehaviors found that they tend to be more concerned about injuries and safety issues with their daughters and tend to focus more on disciplinary issues with their sons (Morrongiello & Hogg, 2004). In another study, parents were instructed to tell their children stories about their own childhoods. In doing so, they were more likely to highlight themes of autonomy and independence when they had sons than when they had daughters (Fiese & Skillman, 2000). Fathers spend more time with their sons and engage in more physical play with them than with their daughters, whereas mothers are more emotionally responsive to girls and encourage more independence with boys (Lanvers, 2004; Raley & Bianchi, 2006). Interestingly, parents—especially parents who claim to be gender neutral in the raising of their children—often fail to acknowledge their socializing role and resort to biological explanations about “hard wiring” when their kids behave in gender stereotypical ways (Kane, 2006).

As children grow older, parents tend to encourage increasingly gender-typed activities (Liben & Bigler, 2002). Research consistently shows that children’s household tasks differ along gender lines (Antill, Goodnow, Russell, & Cotton, 1996). For instance, boys are more likely to mow the lawn, shovel snow, take out the garbage, and do the yard work, whereas girls are given chores like cleaning the house, washing dishes, cooking, and babysitting their younger siblings (L. White & Brinkerhoff, 1981). These discrepancies are clearly linked to the different social roles ascribed to men and women, which are discussed in more detail in Chapter 12.

Parental gender expectations—both before and after a child is born—can be powerful (Kane, 2009). Here’s how one father put it, “I always wanted a son . . . I wanted to teach [him] to play basketball . . . baseball, and so forth.” Daughters, by contrast, yield very different expectations: “I wanted [a girl] . . . to dress her up and to buy the dolls . . . A girl was someone that you could do all the things that you like to do with more than you could a boy” (Kane, 2009 p. 373).

Gender instructions seem to be particularly rigid and restrictive for U.S. boys. Indeed, the social costs for gender non-conformity are disproportionately severe for boys (Risman & Seale, 2010). One study found that girls’ play patterns become less stereotypical as they age; boys, however, must

remain ardently masculine (Cherney & London, 2006). As one author put it, girls can still be girls, but boys *must* be boys (Orenstein, 2008).

Consider the different implications of the words *sissy* and *tomboy*. The girl who is a tomboy may fight, use profanity, compete in sports, and climb trees, but her entire gender identity is not called in question by the label. Girls, in general, are given license to do “boy things” (Kimmel, 2004). Indeed, “tomboyiness,” if considered negative at all, is typically defined as temporary—a stage that a girl will eventually grow out of. One study found that tomboy behavior among girls usually begins by age 5 or 6 and ceases, on average, around the age of 12 (B. L. Morgan, 1998).

But the chances for boys to play “girl games” without ridicule are rare, and the risks for doing so are steep. The sissy is not simply a boy who enjoys female pursuits. He is suspiciously soft and effeminate. His “sissyness” is likely to be seen as reflective of his sexual essence, a sign to some of his imminent homosexuality.

It’s worth noting, however, that not all parents subscribe so tightly to traditional gender expectations when it comes to raising their sons. A small but growing number of parents have begun to advocate a gender-fluid approach to childrearing by, for instance, allowing their sons to wear dresses and high heels, if that’s what they want to do. They refer to their children as “pink boys”—males with a strong interest in traditionally female presentation who still identify as boys (Padawer, 2012). They want their children to occupy the “middle space” between traditional boyhood and traditional girlhood. Although they are fully aware of the problems these boys will face when they display their appearance preferences in public (both from other children as well as adults), they argue that nobody fits the dichotomous gender categories perfectly anyway, so why should they crush their children’s individuality by forcing them uncomfortably into a traditional gender group? But their battle is an uphill one as they fight against a community of others whose responses range from confused to hostile.

For the most part, parents participate in gender socialization through the things they routinely provide for their children: clothes, adornments, books, videos, and so forth. Clothes not only provide visible markers of gender; they also send messages about how that person ought to be treated and direct behavior along traditional gender lines (Shakin, Shakin, & Sternglanz, 1985). Frilly outfits do not lend themselves easily to rough-and-tumble play. Likewise, it is difficult to walk quickly or assertively in high heels and tight miniskirts. Clothes for boys and men rarely restrict physical movement in this way. Toys and games are an especially influential source of gender information parents provide their children.

MICRO-MACRO CONNECTION

GIRLS' TOYS AND BOYS' TOYS

Like most people over the age of 50, I can remember a time when toys played a very different role in children’s lives than they do now. When I was a kid, my friends and I didn’t have many toys, and we usually ended up improvising playthings out of available materials like tree branches, empty boxes, and old stringless tennis rackets. When we did receive a new toy, it was usually a special occasion, like a birthday, a holiday, or a

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cavity-free dental checkup. Every once in a while we'd save up enough money, walk down to the local toy shop, and buy some toy for ourselves that we'd been coveting for months. The toys were simple and straightforward—wagons, fire engines, dolls, balls, trains, board games—and we'd use them until they broke or wore out. When our parents detected a significant spurt in our maturity, they might get us a toy that required special caution: a chemistry set, an Easy-Bake Oven, an electric racing car set.

Today, toys have changed. They are now a multibillion-dollar business, part of a giant transnational, interconnected industry. It's virtually impossible to buy a toy these days that's not linked to some new film, television show, fast food restaurant, or other high-powered marketing campaign. Toy companies now regularly produce TV cartoons based on their own products (C. L. Williams, 2006). Parents find it difficult to resist their children's wishes, which are likely to be formed by television advertisements. Try taking a small child to McDonald's without feeling the pressure to buy a Happy Meal with a toy. The quaint, independent toyshop of the past has been replaced by the massive toy mega-warehouse filled with endless aisles stocked from floor to ceiling with boxes sporting eye-popping colors and screaming images. Even serious world events are now linked to toys. Shortly after Navy SEALs killed Osama bin Laden in 2011, toy companies began to manufacture and market "SEAL Team 6" toys, ranging from posable action figures to plastic weapons.

But the current state of the toy industry is not simply a result of profit-hungry corporations trying to find new ways to exploit the child market (G. Cross, 1997). Toys have always played a significant socializing role in teaching children about the prevailing cultural conceptions of gender. In the 1950s—a time in U.S. history when most adults had endless faith in the goodness of technological progress—Erector Sets and chemistry sets were supposed to encourage boys to be engineers and scientists. Dollhouses and baby dolls taught girls to be modern homemakers and mothers during a time when girls typically assumed they'd occupy those roles in adulthood.

Today, a quick glance at Saturday morning television commercials, toy store shelves, or manufacturers' websites reveals that toys and games remain solidly segregated along gender lines. For instance, the website of the retail giant Toys "R" Us gives online shoppers the option of selecting "girls' toys" or "boys' toys." The featured categories for boys include "Action Figures," while the featured categories for girls include "Dolls" and "Bath, Beauty Accessories." And although both boys' and girls' toys have a category called "Building Sets," the boys' sets include a "Star Wars Jedi Interceptor," a "Call of Duty Half Track Troop Transporter," and "Monster Fighter Vampire Castle"; the girls' sets, on the other hand, include "Cinderella's Romantic Castle," "Hello Kitty Beach House," and "Barbie's Glam House."

"Girls' toys" still revolve around themes of domesticity, fashion, and motherhood. They encourage creativity, nurturing, and physical attractiveness. "Boys' toys" emphasize action and adventure and encourage exploration, competition, and aggression (C. L. Miller, 1987; Renzetti & Curran, 2003). Gender-specific toys foster different traits and skills in children and thereby further separate boys and girls into different patterns of social development.

The iconic and highly stereotypical "Barbie" doll has been one of the best-selling girls' toys for 50 years. In recent years, competitors such as "American Girl" dolls have

gained in popularity, challenging Barbie's market primacy. These dolls are advertised as celebrating "all that girls can be" and come in a variety of historical characters, each with her own backstory. "Addy Walker" lived in the 19th century and was an escaped slave. "Molly McIntire" grew up during World War II. "Julie Albright" was a fun-loving girl in the 1970s who struggled to adjust to a new school.

Toy manufacturers also continue to make fortunes promoting war toys, competitive games of strategy, and sports paraphernalia for boys. In 1983, the popular action figure G.I. Joe got his own TV show; by 1988, two thirds of American boys between the ages of 5 and 11 owned G. I. Joes (G. Cross, 1997). Today, the boys' toy market is saturated with the plastic descendants of Joe: high-tech soldiers, muscle-bound action figures from popular comic books and movies, and intergalactic warriors. A live-action G.I. Joe film hit the theaters in 2009.

Video and online games have become a particularly lucrative product in recent years. The majority of gamers are young men, who account for nearly 60% of all those who regularly play computer and video games (Statista, 2015). Among those who are "addicted" to Internet gaming, teenage boys outnumber girls 10 to 1 (Spada, 2014).

Not surprisingly, most of these games are designed by males for other males. Female characters in games with titles like *Bayonetta*, *Rapelay*, *Dead or Alive: Xtreme Beach Volleyball*, *Grand Theft Auto*, and *Lollipop Chainsaw* are provocatively sexual, scantily clad, and voluptuous. Many games portray female characters as prostitutes and strippers who are frequent targets of violence at the hands of psychopathic male characters. In the online game *Boneless Girl*, players poke, pull, and throw a bikini-wearing girl across the screen to get her through a maze of bubbles. *Duke Nukem Forever* allows players to slap seminaked women if they don't cooperate. To promote this game, 2K Games launched an accompanying website that contained a flash game in which female targets take off a piece of clothing for every successful shot until they are topless. The gender messages in such games may have a detrimental effect on both boys' attitudes toward girls and women and their conceptions of appropriate male behavior.

From time to time, toy manufacturers have attempted—usually only halfheartedly—to blur the lines between boys' and girls' toys. Several years ago, the Hasbro toy company tried to interest boys in troll dolls, which are traditionally popular among girls. What it came up with were old-fashioned action figures in the shape of a troll, with names like "Troll Warrior" and "Battle Troll" (Lawson, 1993). Other companies have tried to sell girls action figures and building blocks, which are typically the province of boys, but have drifted into traditional gender stereotypes. For instance, Mattel, the maker of Barbie, tried to move away from the doll's oversexualized, hyperfeminine image in 2012 by introducing a construction set for girls called "Mega Bloks Barbie Build 'n Style." However, the set was bubblegum pink and centered on building a dream mega-mansion. Similarly, the popular Lego building blocks that boys have used for decades to make towers and monsters still come in vivid primary colors. But they are also available in more feminine, pastel colors and come in kits that can be used to make jewelry and dollhouses. In addition, Lego recently began promoting the "Friends" line of play systems explicitly for girls, with themes such as "Mia's Bedroom," "Bunny and Babies," and "Heartlake Pet Salon."

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For the most part, toy manufacturers are still quick to exploit the gender-distinct roles children are encouraged to pursue when they become adults. They know full well that the few adults who do object to gender-specific toys will face disappointed children scowling at the sight of some gender-neutral alternative (C. L. Williams, 2006). Fisher-Price offers the “Little Mommy” doll, a soft, cuddly baby that drinks from a bottle and comes with a potty seat for toilet training. Playmates Toys’ “Amazing Amanda” laughs, talks, cries, asks for hugs, and changes facial expressions. Mattel makes a pregnant version of Barbie’s friend Midge (called “Happy Family Midge”). She comes with a distended tummy that, when removed, reveals a 1¾-inch baby nestled in the doll’s plastic uterus. The doll comes with everything a girl needs to play out the birth and care of the new baby, including diapers (pink if it’s a girl, blue if it’s a boy), birth certificate, bottles, rattles, changing table, tub, and crib. All these dolls clearly teach young girls the cultural value of motherhood, a role most girls are encouraged and expected to enter later in life. You’d be hard pressed to find a comparable toy, popular among boys, that prepares them for future roles as fathers.

INSTITUTIONS AND SOCIALIZATION

It should be clear by now that becoming who we are is a complex process embedded in the larger social structure. We are much more than the sum of our anatomical and neurological parts. Cultural attitudes toward class, race, and gender can dramatically affect our personal identities. But various social institutions—in particular, the educational system, religious organizations, and the mass media—exert considerable influence on our self-concept, our values, and our perspectives as well.

Education

In contemporary industrial societies, the most powerful institutional agent of socialization, after the family, is education. In fact, according to the structural-functionalist perspective, the primary reason schools exist is to socialize young people. Children formally enter the school system around age 5, when they begin kindergarten, although many enter earlier in preschool or nursery school. At this point, the “personalized” instruction of the family is replaced by the “impersonalized” instruction of the school, where children in most developed countries will remain for the next 13 years or longer. No other nonfamily institution has such extended and consistent control over a person’s social growth.

Although schools are officially charged with equipping students with the knowledge and skills they need to fulfill various roles in society (e.g., reading, writing, mathematics, science), they also teach students important social, political, and economic values. When students set up simulated grocery stores or banks, they are learning about the importance of free enterprise and finance in a capitalist society; when they hold mock elections, they are being introduced to a democratic political system; when they spend time tending a school garden or setting up recycling bins, they are learning to nurture the earth.

More subtly, schools teach students what they can expect for themselves in the world. In many school districts, children are grouped into different programs, or tracks, based on an assessment of their academic abilities. In a typical high school, for example, some students will take courses designed to prepare them for college, whereas others will take more general or vocational courses

designed to prepare them for work after they graduate. **Tracking** clearly determines future outcomes: Students in the higher tracks often go on to prestigious universities; those in the lower tracks may not go to college at all. Tracking can, therefore, ultimately affect employment opportunities, income levels, and overall quality of life.

Not surprisingly, some parents will go to great lengths to increase the likelihood of their children's success in school. For instance, some parents nowadays choose to delay enrolling their children in kindergarten for a year—a practice known as “academic redshirting”—to allow extra time for social, emotional, and intellectual growth as well as to ensure that the child is not the smallest in the class (Gootman, 2006). Between 1968 and 2005, the proportion of American 6-year-olds enrolled in first grade or above dropped from 96% to 84%. It's not that there were fewer 6-year-olds in the population. It was because more 6-year-olds were in kindergarten rather than first grade (Deming & Dynarski, 2008). In 2011, 1 in 11 kindergarten-age children had not started attending school yet (S. Wang & Aamodt, 2011).

The practice of academic redshirting has a fair amount of support. Some research has shown that children who are older than their classmates perform better academically and athletically (cited in E. Weil, 2007). For their part, kindergarten teachers often encourage redshirting because more mature children are better behaved and initially produce better test scores than younger classmates (S. Wang & Aamodt, 2011).

However, others point out that the consequences of redshirting reverberate beyond the kindergarten classroom. For instance, disadvantaged students are more likely than others to drop out of school. If they also started school late, they lose time at the beginning and at the end of their education. Moreover, children who start school late will experience delayed entry into the paid labor force, which means there will be fewer workers paying into the social security system that will support a growing number of retirees (Deming & Dynarski, 2008).

Ironically, although individual accomplishment is stressed in U.S. schools through grades and report cards, students learn that their future success in society may be determined as much by who they are as by what they achieve. Ample evidence shows that teachers react to students on the basis of race, religion, social class, and gender (Wilkinson & Marrett, 1985). It is in school that many children are first exposed to the fact that people and groups are ranked in society, and soon they get a sense of their own standing in the social hierarchy.

Some sociologists argue that schooling in most cultures is designed not so much to provide children with factual information and encourage creativity as to produce passive, nonproblematic conformists who will fit into the existing social order (Gracey, 1991). This training in conformity involves several different dimensions (Brint, 1998). First, there is *behavioral* conformity. Teachers in the early grades typically keep children in line by controlling their bodily movements, such as making them sit still or forcing them to raise their hands before speaking. Some schools still work to ensure such conformity through strict punishment of misbehavior. According to the U.S. Department of Education, about 223,000 students are subjected to corporal punishment annually in the 19 states where it is allowed (Center for Effective Discipline, 2012). Second, schools teach *moral* conformity. Teachers often instruct children about virtues such as honesty, courage, kindness, fairness, and respect. Finally, schools teach children to conform to *culturally* approved styles and outlooks. In some societies, teachers reward their students for showing a quick wit; in other societies, children are rewarded for demonstrating thoughtfulness and asking deep, probing questions. Such training socializes students to adopt traits that people consider culturally desirable within that society.

Sometimes these different dimensions overlap. Rules against arguing with the teacher, for instance, teach children the moral “goodness” of respecting authority. But they can also foster passivity and give students their first taste of control by authoritative adults other than their

parents. Such classroom regulations, then, help impose discipline; at the same time, they prepare children for what they will face in the larger culture. Obeying the kindergarten teacher today prepares the individual for obeying the high school teacher, the college professor, and the boss tomorrow.

Unfortunately, children who seek ways to express their creativity often become underachievers who resent the constraining structure of the classroom, excessive rules and regulations, and the emphasis on conformity at the expense of independence (K. Kim & Van Tassel-Baska, 2010). Not surprisingly, numerous studies have found that American children's creativity—sometimes referred to as “CQ,” or “creativity quotient”—has declined significantly over the past two decades, especially among younger children (cited in Bronson & Merryman, 2010).

Other countries have made childhood creativity a national priority. In 2008, Great Britain revamped its secondary school curricula to emphasize “idea generation” and not just traditional academic subjects. The European Union designated 2009 as “the European Year of Creativity and Innovation.” Chinese schools have begun to adopt a problem-solving approach to education rather than drilling and rote memorization (Bronson & Merryman, 2010).

Although American schools still, for the most part, emphasize order and discipline, educators are beginning to pay more attention to the importance of creativity, developing curricula that incorporate innovation and problem solving into all subject areas, not just the arts. An increasingly popular approach to kindergarten, called “purposeful play,” involves teachers subtly guiding students to learning goals through games, art, and fun (Rich, 2015). Some schools even work to instill values that seem at odds with existing social arrangements. School systems in Minnesota, New Jersey, and Texas, for example, have been experimenting with a novel approach to teaching and learning in their elementary schools. Instead of forcing students to sit still during class time, teachers allow them to stand up and move around as much as they want. Even the desks are adjustable so students can stand at them to work if they like. Teachers claim that students sustain their attention longer and learn better than those in more traditional classrooms (Saulny, 2009b).

Because formal education is so important in the everyday lives of most children, the agenda of a particular school system, regardless of its philosophy or method, cannot help but influence the types of people they will eventually become.

Religion

As the structural-functionalist perspective tells us, religion is the social institution that tends to the spiritual needs of individuals and serves as a major source of cultural knowledge. It plays a key role in developing people's ideas about right and wrong. It also helps form people's identities by providing coherence and continuity to the episodes that make up each individual's life (Kearl, 1980). Religious rites of passage, such as baptisms, bar and bat mitzvahs, confirmations, and weddings, reaffirm an individual's religious identity while impressing on him or her the rights and obligations attached to each new status (J. H. Turner, 1972).

Religion occupies a complex place in U.S. life. Structural changes in society have made religious affiliation somewhat unstable in recent years. For instance, as people move from one location to another, many of the ties that bind them to the same religion—most notably, networks of family and friends—are broken. Less than 40% of U.S. residents attend religious services once a week or more (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2012b). A growing number of people see religion's socializing influence as waning (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2014b). Most U.S. residents are actually quite ignorant about basic religious history and texts (Prothero, 2007).

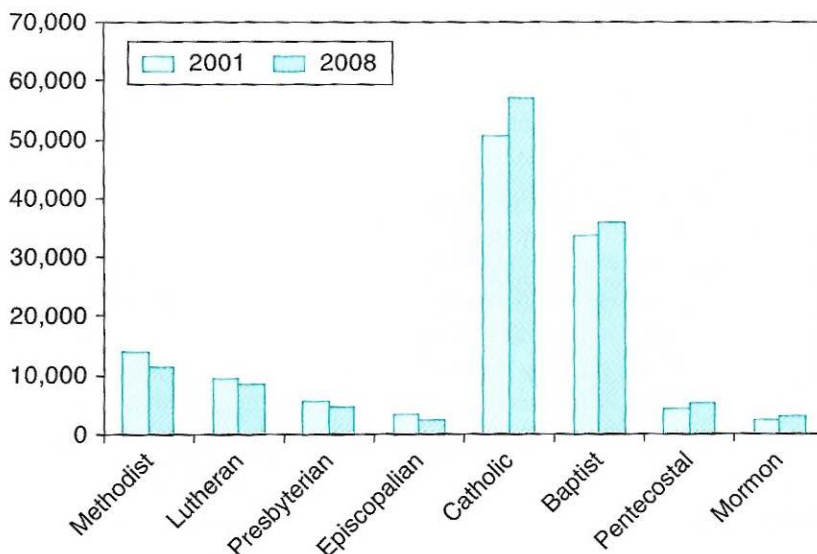
When 3,400 Americans were asked 32 questions about the Bible, world religions, and religious figures, they only got about half of the questions right on average, even when the questions concerned their own religion. In fact, self-described atheists and agnostics scored significantly higher on this test of religious knowledge than Protestants and Catholics (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2010b).

Furthermore, the percentage of Americans who identify with *no* religion (atheists, agnostics, and those who say they are spiritual but have no religious affiliation) grew from 16% in 2007 to 23% in 2014. The trend is especially pronounced among those younger than 30. Consequently, over the past decade, many of the most powerful religious groups have experienced a decline in membership (see Exhibit 5.2). Indeed, since 2007, the percentage of Americans who identify as Christian has declined from 79% to 71% (Pew Research Center, 2015a).

However, a decline in membership does not necessarily mean that all religions are losing their socializing effect in U.S. society. Indeed, at the same time that membership in some religions has shrunk, that of other churches has increased over the past decade (see Exhibit 5.2). And membership in a variety of non-Christian religious groups has grown significantly as well. For instance, between 1990 and 2008, the number of Muslims and Buddhists in the United States increased from a little less than 1 million to more than 2.5 million (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2015). In fact, population experts project that over the next 20 years, the number of Muslims will grow at twice the rate of non-Muslims (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2011). Immigration has helped fuel this growth. More than four times as many immigrants as native-born Americans report non-Christian religious affiliations (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2008).

Although religion may not look the same as it did 50 years ago, it still remains a fundamental socializing agent in many Americans' lives. Compared with most other Western democracies—such

EXHIBIT 5.2 Change in Church Membership, 2001–2008



SOURCE: ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2015, Table 82.

as Canada, Germany, France, Great Britain, and Australia—people in the United States stand out for the depth of their religious beliefs (Zoll, 2005). Consider these other facts:

- Eighty-four percent of U.S. adults say that religion plays a big role in their lives (cited in Zoll, 2005). In contrast, 52% of Norwegians and 55% of Swedes say that God doesn't matter to them at all (cited in Ferguson, 2004).
- Ninety-three percent of Americans—including those who report no religious affiliation—believe in God or a “higher power” (cited in Weiner, 2011).
- Two thirds of Americans believe that God is best described as the all-powerful, all-knowing perfect creator of the universe who rules the world today (The Barna Group, 2007).
- Sixty-five percent of American adults believe that all of these aspects of the Christmas story—the virgin birth, the journey of the magi, the angel's announcement to the shepherds, and the manger story—reflect events that actually happened (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2014a).
- Seventy-two percent of Americans say that the display of Christian symbols (like Nativity scenes) on government property should be allowed, either alone or accompanied by symbols of other faiths (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2014a).
- Two thirds of married Americans had religious weddings and two thirds of Americans, in general, expect to have a religious funeral (Kosmin & Keysar, 2009).
- Among 18- to 29-year-olds who are *not* affiliated with any existing religion, 46% believe in heaven, 54% believe in life after death, and 58% believe in miracles (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2010a).

Moreover, we still consider ourselves “one nation under God,” and our money still proclaims our trust in God. It's virtually impossible these days to watch a music awards show without seeing a winner acknowledging God's role in her or his success or a sporting event without seeing a baseball player cross himself before batting, a football player point skyward after scoring a touchdown, or a basketball player in a postgame interview thank God for guiding the shot that led to his team's victory. Some public schools around the country continue to hold prayer services or bible studies, in spite of the threat of lawsuits by organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union (Eckholm, 2011a).

Religion is also a key component of the American political system. Americans are far more likely than people in other industrialized countries to be willing to mix politics and religion. No sitting president would ever dare end a State of the Union speech without asking God to bless the United States of America. As one author put it, “America is the last country left whose citizens don't laugh out loud when their leader asks God to bless the country” (Ignatieff, 2005, p. 47). Nearly half of Americans believe that houses of worship should openly express their views on important social and political issues and about a third think they should openly support particular candidates (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2014b). Two thirds of Americans feel that it is important that an American president have strong religious beliefs (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2004). In fact, in some states people who don't believe in God are not eligible to hold public office (Goodstein, 2014a).

Mass Media

Another powerful institutional agent of socialization is the media. Newspapers, magazines, television, radio, film, and the Internet transmit persuasive messages on the nature of reality. They are

VISUAL ESSAY—THANK GOD . . . (OR AT LEAST THE QUARTERBACK!)

Whether you're a devout Christian or an unswerving atheist, there's no denying that religion occupies a key place in U.S. society. Even as membership in mainline religious organizations and attendance at traditional religious services have dropped, people have found other, non-traditional, ways to express their religious devotion. For instance, we've grown accustomed to seeing athletes point to the heavens after hitting a home run or striking out a batter, kneel down to "Tebow" after scoring a touchdown or winning a race, or gather for a group prayer after a competition.

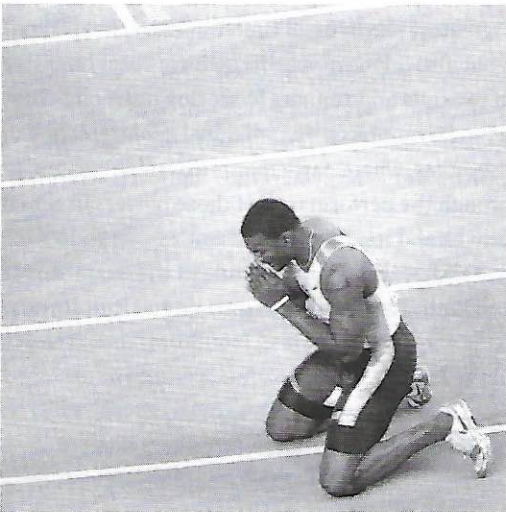
Do you think it is appropriate for an athlete to thank God after a successful individual play or a team victory? Some professional sports leagues—like the NFL—now penalize taunting one's opponent or displaying excessive enthusiasm. Should religious gestures likewise be punished? Can you think of other "non-religious" places or circumstances where people routinely express their religious beliefs? Let's look at this issue from a different perspective: Where are expressions of religiosity never seen? Why *don't* you see people pointing skyward or dropping to a knee after buying a great bread in a bakery or cashing a check at a bank? In general, what role, if any, do you think religion ought to play in secular sectors of social life?



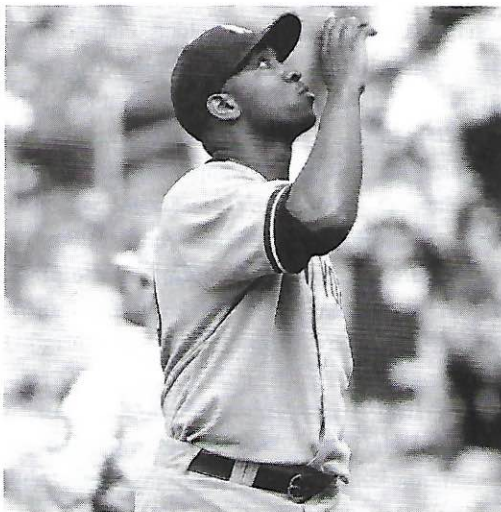
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the gatekeepers of political, economic, and social information, defining what is and isn't important (Marger, 2005). They also tell us the type of person we "should" be, from how we should perform our jobs to how different social classes live to what our sexual relationships and families are supposed to look like. The media teach us about prevailing values, beliefs, myths, stereotypes, and trends (Gitlin, 1979) and provide an avenue through which we learn new attitudes and behavior (Bandura & Walters, 1963).

Media exposure is pervasive in the United States:

- Youth between the ages of 8 and 18 spend over 7 1/2 hours a day consuming all types of electronic media. And given the amount of time they spend multitasking, today's youth cram about 10 hours and 45 minutes of media content into those 7 1/2 hours (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010).
- Nearly 80% of teenagers now have cell phones; half of them are smartphones, up from just 23% in 2011. Three fourths of teens access the Internet on their phones, tablets, and other mobile devices (Pew Research Center, 2013b).
- Children under the age of 8 are exposed to almost 4 hours of background television each day (times when the television is on but the child is involved in another activity; Lapierre, Piotrowski, & Linebarger, 2012).
- Thirty-eight percent of children *under 2* have used a mobile device for to access some type of media (Common Sense Media, 2013).

Seemingly with each mass killing—in places like Aurora, Colorado, Newton, Connecticut, or Roseburg, Oregon—attention refocuses on the role of violent media in such tragedies. So it's not surprising that sociologists, psychologists, and, of course, politicians continue to debate the degree to which sex and violence in film, television, and video games influence behavior, particularly among young people.

While U.S. television and other media entertain and expose us to diverse ways of life, they also send powerful messages about important cultural values like individual success. Consider the role of televised sports. Television has reduced the sports experience to a sequence of personal achievements—a cultural value on which the entire U.S. social structure is based. We have grown used to hearing descriptions such as "world record holder," "superstar," and "greatest player of all time." Praise is heaped not only on individuals and the occasional "dynasty" team but also on more specific actions: "best offensive rebounder," "best return of serve," "best at hitting with two outs and runners in scoring position," "best open field tackler," "best chip out of a sand trap." The media emphasis on individual achievement can also be seen in the growing popularity of online fantasy leagues, where participants assemble "teams" of real players and compete against other participants through the performance of those players in actual games. Individual statistics are what matters; a team's wins and losses are irrelevant.

Consider also the most emblematic play in professional basketball today: the slam dunk. It's impossible to watch television highlights of a basketball game without seeing a thunderous, explosive, gravity-defying dunk:

The dunk is a declaration of power and dominance, of machismo. In a team game, an ensemble of five players a side, it is an expression of self. In a sport devoted to selling sneakers, the dunk is a marketing tour de force, the money shot at the end of every worthy basketball sequence. (Sokolove, 2005, p. 42)

To some observers, though, fans' obsession with acrobatic dunks has made the fundamentals of success—namely, teamwork and sacrifice—seem irrelevant (Sokolove, 2005). In a world where muscled-up athletes, whose only reliable offensive skill is the ability to dunk the ball, can earn millions and where ESPN nationally televises the games of high school phenoms, it's not surprising that individual athleticism has overshadowed the collaborative aspect of the game. Consequently, many young players today are more concerned with perfecting their individual moves than with developing other skills—passing, rebounding, shooting from various spots on the floor, playing defense, and other less glamorous but no less essential elements of a team effort.

The socializing role of the media is especially apparent when it comes to gender. Children's books, for instance, teach youngsters what other little boys or girls in their culture do and what is expected of them. In the early 1970s, Lenore Weitzman and her colleagues studied the portrayal of gender in popular U.S. preschool books (Weitzman, Eifler, Hodada, & Ross, 1972). They found that boys played a more significant role in the stories than girls by a ratio of 11 to 1. Boys were more likely to be portrayed in adventurous pursuits or activities that required independence and strength; girls were likely to be confined to indoor activities and portrayed as passive and dependent. These gender stereotypes in children's books decreased only slightly over the next several decades (S. B. Peterson & Lach, 1990). Recent attempts to publish more nonsexist children's books have had little impact on the overall market. For instance, elementary school reading textbooks still primarily portray males as aggressive, argumentative, and competitive (L. Evans & Davies, 2000). "Gender equality" in children's books usually involves female characters taking on characteristics and roles typically associated with males. These books rarely, if ever, portray male characters exhibiting feminine traits (Diekman & Murnen, 2004).

Similarly, film and television continue to portray males and females in stereotypical ways. Consider these facts (Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, 2012, 2014):

- Only 29% of characters in American films are female, despite the fact that girls and women make up over half the U.S. population.
- In feature films, female characters were more than twice as likely as male characters to be shown in sexually revealing attire and to be thin.
- Comments about appearance were five times more likely to be directed at female film characters than male characters.
- From 2006 to 2009, not one female character in a G-rated family film was depicted in the field of medical science, as a business leader, in law, or in politics. In these films, 8 out of 10 working characters were male, which is a contrast to real world statistics, where women comprise 50% of the workforce.

Similar gender portrayals exist on television. About 40% of characters on prime-time television drama series are female. The figure drops to 30% on children's shows. Only on reality TV does the proportion of female characters approach that of males (48%). When it comes to occupational depiction on television, traditional gender stereotypes remain. On prime-time shows, women comprise 14% of corporate executives, 28% of high-level politicians, 29% of doctors, and 21% of scientists/engineers (S. L. Smith, Choueiti, Prescott, & Pieper, 2012). Even the media coverage of female sports events tends to focus on the physical appearance and sexual attractiveness of the athletes and not just their competitive accomplishments (Billings, Angelini, & Eastman, 2005; Shugart, 2003). Not surprisingly, one of the most popular televised events in each Summer Olympics is women's beach volleyball,

where athletes' "uniforms" consist of revealing bathing suits. In order to revive flagging interest in its sport during the 2012 Summer Olympics, the Badminton World Federation issued an edict requiring all female players to wear short skirts to create a more "attractive presentation" (J. Longman, 2011).

Media advertising also perpetuates gender stereotypes. Three quarters of the central characters in radio advertisements are men. And men are significantly more likely than women to be portrayed as authorities on products rather than users (Monk-Turner, Kouts, Parris, & Webb, 2007). A study of 467 TV commercials shown between children's cartoons found that, as in the shows themselves, male characters are more likely than female characters to be in a major role, to be active rather than passive, and to be depicted in an occupational setting (S. Davis, 2003). Similarly, an analysis of more than 500 U.S. and Australian commercials targeting children found that girls were much more likely than boys to be portrayed as shy, giggly, and passive (Browne, 1998). The differences were less pronounced in Australia, however, where activists have had more success in countering gender stereotypes in the media than in the United States.

All these gender images have a strong influence on children's perceptions and behaviors (Witt, 2005). Children who watch a lot of television are more likely to hold stereotypical attitudes toward gender, exhibit gender-related characteristics, and engage in gender-related activities than children who watch little television (M. Morgan, 1987; Signorielli, 1990). In one study, girls who did not have stereotypical conceptions of gender to begin with showed a significant increase in such attitudes after 2 years of heavy television watching (M. Morgan, 1982). The more high school students watch talk shows and prime-time programs that depict a lot of sexual activity, the more likely they are to hold traditional sexual stereotypes (Ward & Friedman, 2006).

CONCLUSION

Becoming the people we are is a complex social process. Those intimate characteristics we hold so dear—our self-concept, our gender, and our racial and ethnic identity—reflect larger cultural attitudes, values, and expectations. Yet we are not perfect reflections of society's values. Despite all the powerful socializing institutions that pull our developmental strings, we continue to be and will always be individuals.

Sometimes we ignore our generalized others and strike out on our own with complete disregard for community standards and attitudes. Sometimes we form self-concepts that contradict the information we receive from others about ourselves. Sometimes we willingly violate the expectations associated with our social class, gender, or race. Societal influence can go only so far in explaining how we become who we are. The rest—that which makes us truly unique—remains a fascinating mystery.

YOUR TURN

Being a child or an adolescent is not simply a biological stage of development. It is a social identity. People's experiences with this identity emerge from a particular cultural and historical context as well as the process of socialization that takes place within their families.

But many other social institutions assist in the process of raising children, often in ways that aren't immediately apparent.

To see firsthand how such socialization works, visit a large shopping mall. Most malls today have children's clothing stores (e.g., Baby Gap). If yours

doesn't, go to one of the large department stores and find the children's clothing section. Start with the infants' clothes. Is there a difference between "girls' clothes" and "boys' clothes"? Note the differences in the style, color, and texture of boys' versus girls' clothes. Collect the same information for clothes designed for toddlers, preschoolers, and elementary school-age children.

Now find a store that specializes in clothes for preteens and teenagers. How do clothing styles and materials differ along gender lines at this age level?

After collecting your data, try to interpret the differences you noticed. Why do they exist? What do these differences say about the kinds of social activities in which boys and girls are expected or encouraged to engage? For instance, which clothes are "rugged" and which are "dainty"? How do such differences reinforce our cultural conceptions of masculinity and femininity? Turning your attention to teenagers, how do popular clothing styles encourage sexuality?

The next stop on your sociological shopping trip is a toy store. Can you detect a boys' section and a girls' section? How can you tell? How do the toys differ? What sorts of interactions with other

children do the toys encourage? Competition? Cooperation? Which toys are designed for active play? Which seem to encourage passive play? For what sorts of adult roles do the toys prepare children? Provide specific examples.

Finally, find a bookstore that has a children's book section. Which books are more likely to interest boys? Which will interest girls? Are there different sections for "boy" and "girl" books? What are the differences in the sorts of characters and plots that are portrayed? Does the bookstore have a section that contains books designed to help adolescents through puberty? If so, do these books offer different advice to adolescent boys and girls?

Use your findings in all these areas—clothing, toys, and books—or any others you come across to analyze the role that consumer products play in socializing children into "appropriate" gender roles. Is there more or less gender segregation as children get older? Do you think manufacturers, publishers, retail outlets, and so on are simply responding to market demands (i.e., do they make gender-specific products because that's what people want), or do they play a role in creating those demands?

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- Socialization is the process by which individuals learn their culture and learn to live according to the norms of a particular society. It is how we learn to perceive our world, gain a sense of our own identity, and interact appropriately with others. It also tells us what we should and should not do across a range of situations.
- One of the most important outcomes of socialization for an individual is the development of a sense of self. To acquire a self, children must learn to recognize themselves as unique physical objects, master language, learn to take the roles of others, and, in effect, see themselves from another's perspective.
- Socialization is not just a process that occurs during childhood. Adults must be resocialized into a new galaxy of norms, values, and expectations each time they leave or abandon old roles and enter new ones.
- Through socialization, we learn the social expectations that go with our social class, racial or ethnic group, and gender.
- Socialization occurs within the context of several social institutions—family first, and then schools, religious institutions, and the mass media.

KEY TERMS

agents of socialization: Various individuals, groups, and organizations that influence the socialization process

anticipatory socialization: Process through which people acquire the values and orientations found in statuses they will likely enter in the future

collectivist culture: Culture in which personal accomplishments are less important in the formation of identity than group membership

eugenics: Control of mating to ensure that “defective” genes of troublesome individuals will not be passed on to future generations

game stage: Stage in the development of self during which a child acquires the ability to take the role of a group or community (the generalized other) and conform his or her behavior to broad societal expectations

gender: Psychological, social, and cultural aspects of maleness and femaleness

generalized other: Perspective of the larger society and its constituent values and attitudes

identity: Essential aspect of who we are, consisting of our sense of self, gender, race, ethnicity, and religion

individualist culture: Culture in which personal accomplishments are a more important component of one’s self-concept than group membership

looking-glass self: Sense of who we are that is defined by incorporating the reflected appraisals of others

play stage: Stage in the development of self during which a child develops the ability to take a role, but only from the perspective of one person at a time

reflexive behavior: Behavior in which the person initiating an action is the same as the person toward whom the action is directed

resocialization: Process of learning new values, norms, and expectations when an adult leaves an old role and enters a new one

role taking: Ability to see oneself from the perspective of others and to use that perspective in formulating one’s own behavior

self: Unique set of traits, behaviors, and attitudes that distinguishes one person from the next; the active source and passive object of behavior

sex: Biological maleness or femaleness

socialization: Process through which one learns how to act according to the rules and expectations of a particular culture

total institution: Place where individuals are cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period and where together they lead an enclosed, formally administered life

tracking: Grouping of students into different curricular programs, or tracks, based on an assessment of their academic abilities

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