Socialization and the Life Course

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The Role of Socialization

Socialization is the lifelong process in which people learn the attitudes, values, and behaviors appropriate for members of a particular culture. Without it, there is no social self.

Feldman’s Study of Prisoner-Firefighters in Arizona

- Sociologist Lindsey Feldman spent **15 months** observing crews of prison inmates who fight wildfires in the western United States; she became a certified wildland firefighter and worked alongside them
- Fieldnotes, 10 June 2016: twenty-five firefighters walk into a restaurant, faces sooty from a three-day fire in the Arizona mountains; the restaurant-goers stand and applaud
- A small boy runs over, hugs one crew member’s leg, and says: “I want to be like you when I grow up!”
- The crew was **22 prisoners and 3 correctional officers**. Sammy, the man with the boy attached to his leg, was serving nine years for possession of methamphetamines
- Minutes later, with tears in his eyes, he said: “**That just healed me.**”

The Same People Carried Two Social Identities

Twenty-two prisoners and three correctional officers walked into the restaurant

- The chapter uses the prisoner-firefighters to show that socialization can have a powerful impact **even on adults**
- Every day the crew left the prison, “a space where criminality is defined and maintained,” and moved into a space between the categories *criminal* and *hero*
- Prisoner-firefighters had to use critical-thinking skills, interact with the public, and enjoyed freedoms other prisoners lacked; they built more positive identities and better outcomes in prison and after release (Feldman 2018)

Socialization and Personality Defined

- **Socialization** — the lifelong process in which people learn the attitudes, values, and behaviors appropriate for members of a particular culture
- It occurs through human interactions that begin in infancy and continue through retirement
- We learn from the people most important to us (family, friends, teachers) and from people on the street, on television, in social media, and in films
- Socialization also shapes our **self-images**: people who do not match a culture's ideal of physical attractiveness are disadvantaged socially and in hiring, which can lower self-esteem
- **Personality** — a person's typical patterns of attitudes, needs, characteristics, and behavior

> How much of a person's personality is shaped by culture? Which agents of socialization are the most powerful?

Nature Versus Nurture: From Debate to Interaction

- Researchers once clashed over biological inheritance versus environment in human development: the **nature versus nurture** (heredity versus environment) debate
- Today most social scientists have moved beyond the debate and study the **interaction** of the two
- To see how each factor works, examine situations in which one operates almost entirely without the other (Homans 1979)

Extreme Isolation: The Case of Isabelle

- For the first six years of her life, Isabelle lived in almost total seclusion in a darkened room
- Her only contact was her mother, who could neither speak nor hear; her grandparents, ashamed of the circumstances of her birth, kept the child hidden
- Ohio authorities discovered her in **1938**, when her mother escaped with her
- At age six she could not speak, only make croaking sounds; she communicated with her mother by simple gestures
- She showed a strong fear of strangers, then extreme apathy; on tests of maturity she scored at the level of an **infant**

She had the physical and cognitive potential to learn. What she lacked was interaction.

Isabelle’s Recovery Showed What Socialization Builds

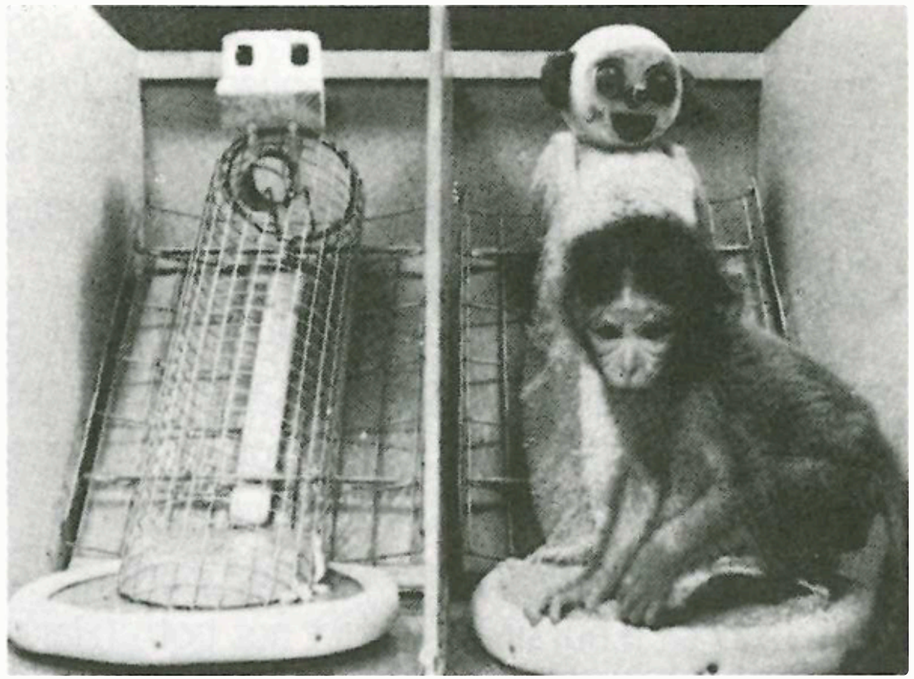
- Specialists designed a systematic training program; after a few days she made her first attempt to speak
- In a little over **two months** she was speaking in complete sentences; nine months later she could identify words and sentences
- Before age 9 she was ready for school with other children; by **14** she was in sixth grade, doing well, and emotionally well adjusted
- Without socialization in her first six years she had been “hardly human in the social sense” (K. Davis 1947)
- The scientists concluded that all children need socialization in the form of love, care, and affection; that need does not end with childhood but continues through the life span

Extreme Neglect: The Romanian Orphans

- In the 1990s attention turned to orphanages in the formerly communist countries of eastern Europe
- In Romanian orphanages, babies once lay in cribs **18 to 20 hours a day**, curled against their feeding bottles, with little adult care, for their first five years
- Many grew up fearful of human contact and prone to unpredictable antisocial behavior; as recently as 2004, some **32,000** Romanian children were institutionalized
- Among orphans adopted abroad, about **20 percent** had adjustment problems so dramatic that adoptive families asked for help
- In 2001 Romania halted international adoptions and placed children with birth families, Romanian adoptive families, or small group homes; UNICEF now uses the program as a model
- Worldwide, an estimated **2.7 million** children live in institutional care (Petrowski, Cappa, and Gross 2017)

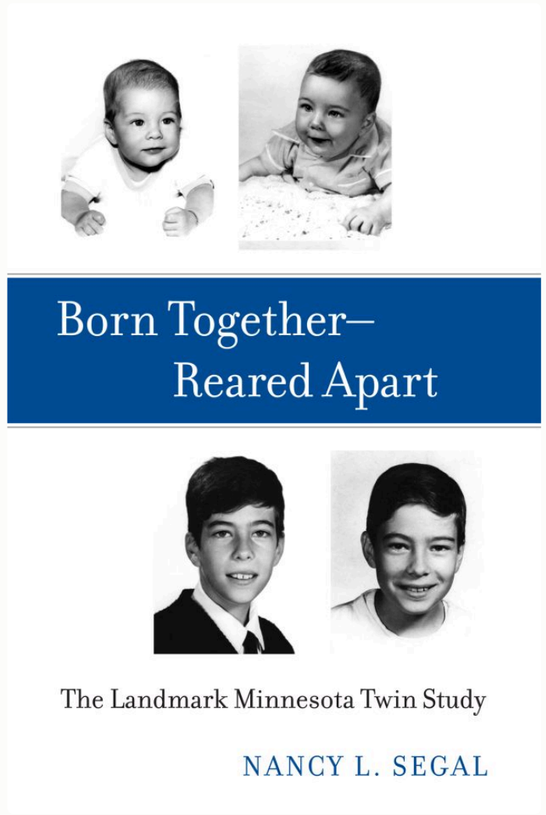
Harlow’s Rhesus Monkeys and the Artificial Mothers

- Harry Harlow (1971) raised rhesus monkeys away from their mothers and from other monkeys
- Like Isabelle, the isolated monkeys were fearful and easily frightened; they did not mate, and females who were artificially inseminated became abusive mothers
- He then offered isolated infants two substitute mothers: a **wire** model that gave milk and a **cloth**-covered model that did not
- Monkey after monkey went to the wire mother for milk, then spent far more time clinging to the cloth mother



What Twin Studies Show About Heredity and Environment

- The Minnesota Twin Family Study has followed **137 sets** of identical twins reared apart
- **Hereditary leanings:** temperament, voice patterns, and nervous habits are strikingly similar even in twins reared apart
- **Environmental leanings:** attitudes, values, chosen mates, and even drinking habits differ far more
- Worldwide, more than **2,700 twin studies** cover **14.5 million** twins. The conclusion: not nature *versus* nurture but nature *and* nurture
- Bipolar disorder has significant genetic components; eating disorders have a much larger social-environment component (Lakhani et al. 2019; Polderman et al. 2015)



Apply the Evidence: Design a Children’s Home in Kuwait

A children’s residential home receives funding for one improvement first.
Which should it choose?

1. More caregivers on each shift
2. The same caregivers staying with the same children over time
3. Daily small-group play and conversation
4. Better rooms, equipment, and screens

The Self and Socialization

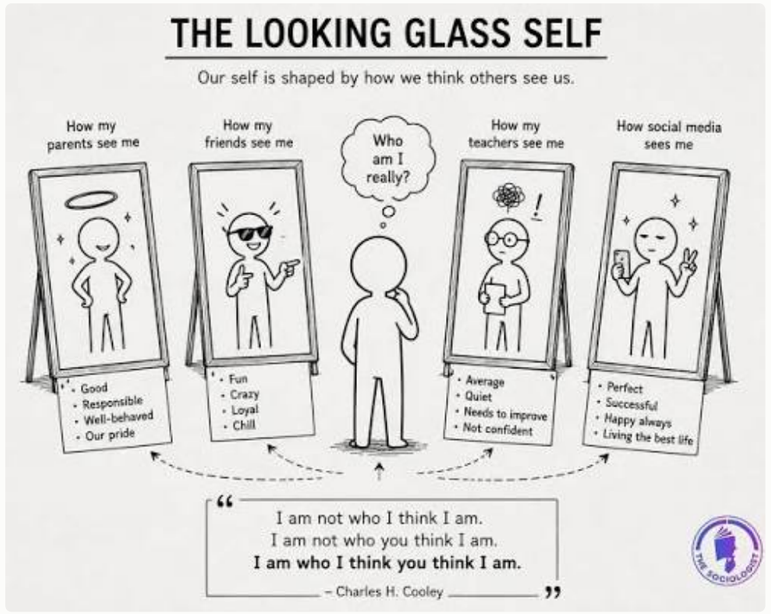
We are not born knowing who we are. The self emerges as we interact with others, and it keeps changing for as long as we live.

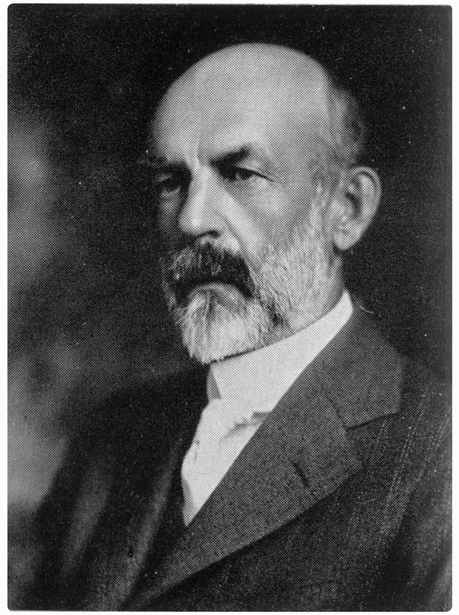
The Self Emerges Through Interaction

- We all hold perceptions, feelings, and beliefs about who we are. We were not born with them
- **Self** — according to George Herbert Mead, a distinct identity that sets us apart from others
- The self is not static; it continues to develop and change throughout our lives
- Sociologists and psychologists both study how the individual develops and modifies the sense of self through social interaction
- Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert Mead, pioneers of the interactionist approach, did the foundational sociological work

Cooley’s Looking-Glass Self

- In the early 1900s Cooley argued that we learn who we are by interacting with others
- Our view of ourselves comes not only from thinking about our own qualities but also from how we think others perceive us
- **Looking-glass self** — Cooley’s phrase emphasizing that the self is the product of our social interactions
- The process has three phases: we imagine how we present ourselves, imagine how others evaluate us, and develop a feeling about ourselves





The Looking-Glass Self Can Be Built on Mistaken Perceptions

- The self results from our **imagination** of how others view us, so a self-identity can rest on an incorrect perception
- A student reacts strongly to a teacher's criticism: (1) the teacher criticized me → (2) the teacher must think I am stupid → (3) I am stupid
- Self-identities also change: if the student receives an A at the end of the course, the feeling of being stupid usually disappears
- **Double consciousness** (W. E. B. Du Bois, Chapter 1) — the division of an individual's identity into two or more social realities; the looking-glass self is a broader view of the same idea

Mead’s Three Stages of the Self

- Mead continued Cooley’s exploration of interactionist theory and described the process by which the self emerges in three distinct stages

MEAD’S STAGES OF THE SELF

Preparatory

Self present? No

Child imitates the actions of others

Adults laugh; the child laughs too

Play

Self present? Developing

Child takes the role of a single other person

First the doctor, then the patient

Game

Self present? Yes

Child considers the roles of two or more others at once

Hide-and-seek: both hider and seeker

Role taking develops in the play stage; the generalized other appears in the game stage (about age 8 or 9)

Mead's Preparatory and Play Stages

- **Preparatory stage:** children merely imitate the people around them, especially family members. A small child bangs on wood while a parent does carpentry, or throws a ball because an older sibling is doing so
- As they grow, children become more adept with **symbols**, the gestures and words that form the basis of human communication, learned from relatives, friends, cartoons, and picture books
- **Play stage:** children begin to pretend to be other people. As an actor "becomes" a character, a child becomes a doctor, parent, superhero, or ship captain
- **Role taking** — the process of mentally assuming the perspective of another and responding from that imagined viewpoint
- A child learns when to ask a parent for favors: if the parent comes home in a bad mood, the child waits until after dinner

Mead’s Game Stage and the Generalized Other

- **Game stage:** at about age eight or nine the child no longer just plays roles but considers several tasks and relationships at once
- As in a football match, players must understand their own position and everyone else’s; a Scout on a hike must know her own duties and those of the other Scouts and the leaders
- **Generalized other** — the attitudes, viewpoints, and expectations of society as a whole that a child takes into account in his or her behavior
- A child does not act polite merely to please one parent; the child learns that politeness is a widespread value endorsed by parents, teachers, and religious leaders

Play stage: one role at a time. Game stage: many roles at once, and an awareness of what “everyone” expects.

Give Me an Example of Each of Mead's Stages

Stage	Self present?	Definition	Example
Preparatory	No	Child imitates the actions of others.	When adults laugh and smile, child laughs and smiles.
Play	Developing	Child takes the role of a single other, as if he or she were the other.	Child first takes the role of doctor, then the role of patient.
Game	Yes	Child considers the roles of two or more others simultaneously.	In game of hide-and-seek, child takes into account the roles of both hider and seeker.

Give me one new example of the **preparatory**, **play**, and **game** stages.

Mead’s Theory of the Self: From the Center Outward

- According to Mead (1964b), the self begins at a **privileged, central position** in a person’s world
- Shown a mountain scene and asked what an observer on the other side would see, young children describe only what is visible from their own side
- This tendency never entirely disappears: people afraid of flying assume the plane that goes down will be theirs; who reads the horoscope page without checking their own sign first?
- As people mature, the self begins to reflect greater concern about the reactions of others
- **Significant others** — the individuals most important in the development of the self, such as a parent, friend, or teacher. Many young people are drawn to the same kind of work their parents do

Goffman: Impression Management and the Dramaturgical Approach

- Erving Goffman asked how we manage our “self” and display to others who we are
- Many daily activities are attempts to convey impressions of who we are
- **Impression management** — Goffman’s term for the altering of the presentation of the self in order to create distinctive appearances and satisfy particular audiences
- **Dramaturgical approach** — a view of social interaction in which people are seen as theatrical performers
- A clerk tries to appear busier than he is when a supervisor is watching; the prisoner-firefighters allow the public to mistake them for full-time firefighters

Box 4-1: Impression Management After Exam Grades

> Grades come back. Imagine the scenario between two students who both scored high; a high scorer and a friend who failed; two students who both failed.

Ace–Ace encounters

are open: there is comfort in sharing a high mark, and even bragging is acceptable. “It’s much easier to admit a high mark to someone who has done better than you, or at least as well.”

Ace–Bomber encounters

are sensitive: Bombers avoid them so as not to “emerge looking like the dumb one”; when forced to interact they appear gracious. Aces offer sympathy, call their own high scores “lucky,” and stress how unfair the exam was so Bombers can save face.

Bomber–Bomber encounters

are closed: students share disappointment in “pity parties” and rehearse excuses such as “I had four exams and two papers due that week” (Albas and Albas 1988, 1996).

Impression Management on Video Calls

- During the coronavirus, sociologists watched impression management move onto Zoom
- The point of a video call is to see others, yet most people constantly stare at their own square to double-check the impression they are conveying

Face-Work and Cooling Out

- **Face-work** — Goffman's term for the efforts people make to maintain the proper image and avoid public embarrassment
- After being turned down, a person may say, "There really isn't an interesting person in this entire crowd." We need to maintain a proper image of the self to keep interaction going
- **Cooling out** — Goffman's term for the strategy of delivering bad news gradually, as when an interviewer gives a candidate a chance before the rejection
- Junhow Wei (2016) studied rejected *American Idol* contestants: they are allowed to vent and reassured that they "have the talent," minimizing the failure

Face-work is not dishonesty. It is the repair work that keeps social life from stalling after embarrassment.

Cooley, Mead, and Goffman Compared

THREE SOCIOLOGISTS, THREE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SELF

Cooley	Mead	Goffman
How is the self created?	**How does the self develop?**	**How is the self presented?**
Looking-glass self	Preparatory, play, game Generalized other	Impression management Dramaturgical approach Face-work

All three are interactionists: the self emerges from interaction with others

Cooley stressed the process by which we **create** a self; Mead focused on how the self **develops** as we learn to interact; Goffman emphasized how we consciously **create images** of ourselves for others.

Freud: The Self as a Social Product with Opposing Parts

- Early psychology, especially Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), stressed the role of **inborn drives** in channeling human behavior
- Like Cooley and Mead, Freud believed the self is a social product, influenced by other people and especially by parents
- Unlike them, he argued that the self has components that work **in opposition**: natural impulsive instincts in constant conflict with societal constraints
- Part of us seeks limitless pleasure; another part favors rational behavior. Through interaction we learn society's expectations and select behavior appropriate to our culture
- Freud was well aware that we sometimes distort reality and behave irrationally

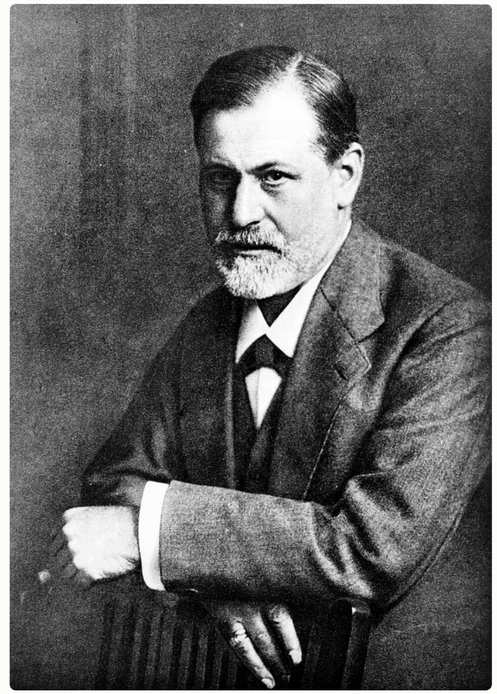


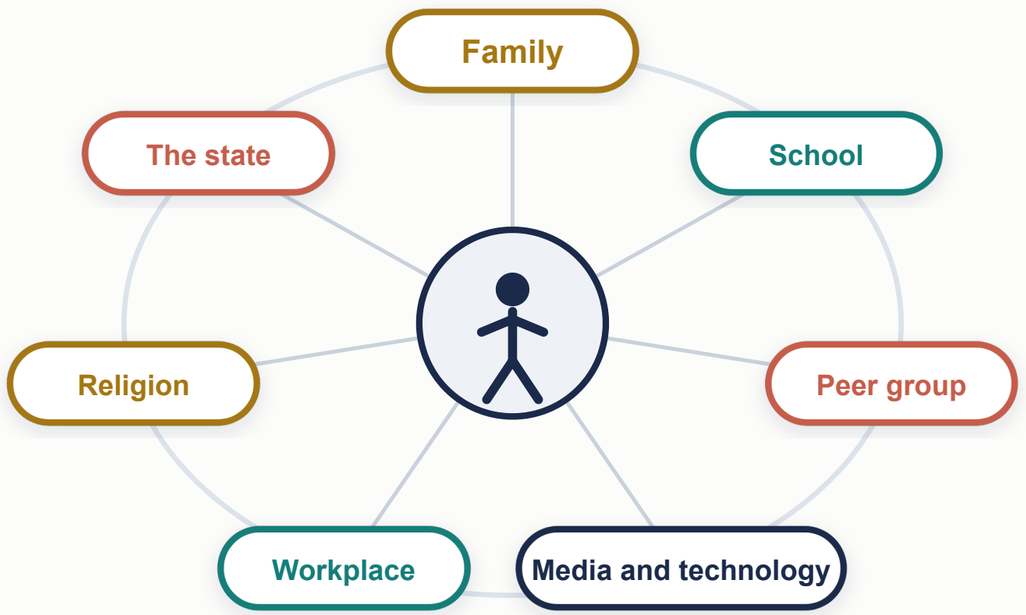
Table 4-2: Theoretical Approaches to Development of the Self

Scholar	Key concepts and contributions	Major points of theory
Charles Horton Cooley 1864–1929, sociologist (USA)	Looking-glass self	Stages of development not distinct; feelings toward ourselves developed through interaction with others
George Herbert Mead 1863–1931, sociologist (USA)	The self; generalized other	Three distinct stages of development; self develops as children grasp the roles of others in their lives
Erving Goffman 1922–1982, sociologist (USA)	Impression management; dramaturgical approach; face-work	Self developed through the impressions we convey to others and to groups
Sigmund Freud 1856–1939, psychotherapist (Austria)	Psychoanalysis	Self influenced by parents and by inborn drives, such as the drive for personal gratification

Agents of Socialization

Socialization is carried out by social forces that continue and alter it throughout life. The family comes first; six other agents keep working on us.

Seven Agents Shape the Self Across Life



The family is the most important agent, especially for children; the others continue the work for life

Schaefer: the family is the most important agent of socialization, especially for children. This chapter also discusses six others: the school, the peer group, the mass media and technology, the workplace, religion, and the state.

Family: Socialization Begins at Birth

- Learning begins shortly after birth. Newborns can hear, see, smell, taste, and feel heat, cold, and pain, so they constantly orient themselves to the surrounding world
- Family members form an important part of that environment, feeding, cleaning, carrying, and comforting the baby
- All families engage in socialization, though the content varies enormously
- In Kuwait, a boy taken to the diwaniya learns, first by imitation and later by role taking, whom to greet first, when to stand, how to hold the finjan, and when to stay quiet. Nobody hands him a rulebook

Generated illustration. The diwaniya example is a local application, not a Schaefer case.

Box 4-2: Rumspringa and Amish Child-Rearing

- The Amish embrace a lifestyle of the mid-1800s: no dancing, no music, no television, no Internet.
- **Rumspringa** (“running around”) — a period of discovery in which adolescents test the subculture’s boundaries at barn dances and by breaking norms against drinking, smoking, and driving. The Amish religion does not support it
- Parents often look the other way. No punishment for listening to the radio, using a phone, or riding a motorcycle/car.

> After tasting mainstream culture freely, what share of Amish youths return and accept the faith?

- **85% to 90%** accept the faith as young adults (Kraybill 2019).

Gender Roles Are Learned, Not Genetically Fixed

- **Gender role** — expectations regarding the proper behavior, attitudes, and activities of males and females
- We traditionally read “toughness” as masculine and “tenderness” as feminine; other cultures do not assign these qualities the same way
- Gender roles do not mean males and females inevitably assume certain roles, or that the roles are entirely distinct. They mean that males and females are **not genetically predetermined** to occupy certain roles
- Parents are the primary guides into a society’s gender roles; other adults, older siblings, mass media, and religious and educational institutions also contribute
- When girls are socialized mainly by mothers and boys by fathers, girls may miss survival skills: in South Asia, fathers teach sons to swim for a fishing life, and girls typically never learn. When the **2004 tsunami** struck, many more men survived than women

School: Teaching the Values and Customs of Society

- Like the family, schools have an explicit mandate to socialize people, especially children, into the norms and values of the culture
- Conflict theorists: schools foster **competition** through built-in rewards and punishments, grades and teacher evaluations. A child struggling with a new skill can come to feel stupid and unsuccessful
- As the self matures, children make increasingly realistic assessments of their intellectual, physical, and social abilities
- **Functionalists:** schools teach children the values and customs of the larger society
- **Conflict theorists** agree but add that schools reinforce divisions, especially of social class: costly higher education gives affluent students an advantage in reaching universities and the best-paying, most prestigious jobs

Peer Group: Peers Become Significant Others

- As a child grows, the family becomes somewhat less important and **peer groups** increasingly assume the role of Mead's significant others
- Within the peer group, young people associate with others of roughly the same age and often similar social status (Giordano 2003)
- In Tokyo, new arrivals can literally **rent a friend**: Client Partners provides a friend or an entire family for a price, because "happiness is born from relationships between people" (Client Partners 2020; Colin 2016)

Mass Media and Technology: Socialization Moves Online

- Radio, movies, recorded music, television, and the Internet have become important agents of socialization. The question is no longer whether young people are plugged in, but **how** they use these resources
- The age at which children go online keeps falling. The American Academy of Pediatrics (2016) advises avoiding digital media, except video-chatting, for children under **18 to 24 months**; for older toddlers, choose high-quality programming and use media together, never solo
- Your feed is an agent of socialization with human curators: the accounts and influencers you follow decide which bodies, purchases, and opinions look normal to you

Technology Lets Socialization Cross Distance

- Zadhe Iyombe once needed an **eight-day** boat trip up the Congo River to talk to his mother; with mobile phones, they could text daily
- Many expatriate workers in Kuwait live apart from the families they support. Calls, voice notes, and video chats can make frequent contact possible across distance
- Technology can carry more than conversation: family routines, advice, language, celebrations, and everyday care can now travel through a phone

> What parts of family socialization can travel through a phone—and what still requires being physically present?

Workplace: Occupational Socialization Continues for Life

- Learning to behave appropriately in an occupation is a fundamental aspect of socialization
- Occupational socialization is most intense in the school-to-job transition but continues through one's work history; technological change may require **resocialization**
- From ages 18 to 52 the typical person holds **12 jobs**, nearly half of them between 18 and 24, for men and women, graduates and non-graduates alike (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2019i)

The State Regulates the Life Course

- Social scientists treat government, or **the state**, as an agent of socialization because it organizes important transitions across the life course
- Public agencies such as hospitals, clinics, schools, and child care centers take on some protective and socializing functions once centered mainly in families
- Government regulations set the ages at which a person may drive, vote, marry without parental permission, work overtime, and retire
- These legal thresholds are not strict rites of passage, but they still mark when society recognizes new rights and responsibilities

Thinking Critically: Functionalist and Conflict Views of Media Socialization

How would functionalist and conflict theorists differ in their analysis of socialization by the mass media?

Functionalist questions: What shared norms, values, and information do media transmit? How do they integrate dispersed people, as Iyombe's texts link Kinshasa to his mother's town?

Conflict questions: Who owns the platforms? Whose values do algorithms and advertisers amplify? Who is excluded when fewer than 1 in 100 people in low-income nations have broadband phones?

Socialization throughout the Life Course

Societies mark the passage from one status to another with rituals, and they keep socializing us, forward into new roles and sometimes backward out of old ones.

Rites of Passage Mark Transitions in Status

- **Rite of passage** — a ritual marking the symbolic transition from one social position to another
- These may mark a **separation**, as in a graduation ceremony, or an **incorporation**, as in an initiation into an organization (Van Gennep [1909] 1960)

Separation: leaving the old status behind

- The ritual publicly ends a position: the person is no longer a child, a student, a single person
- Others are told to stop treating the person in the old way, and the person is released from its obligations
- Typical symbols remove or end something: handing back, taking off, leaving, a symbolic “death”
- The Kota of the Congo paint adolescents **blue**, the color of death, to mark the death of childhood; Naval Academy graduates throw their caps in the air

Incorporation: entering the new status

- The ritual admits the person into a new group or position and announces the new identity to others
- The person takes on new rights, duties, and expectations, and the group commits to recognizing them
- Typical symbols add something: a new name, title, uniform, oath, or a welcome into the group
- An initiation into an organization; Egypt’s **Soboa**, held seven days after birth, welcomes the newborn into the family and the world

- Most rites contain both, but **emphasize** one: graduation stresses leaving school; an initiation stresses joining
- Van Gennep also described a middle phase, **transition**, when a person has left the old status but has not yet entered the new one

Rites of Passage in Kuwait: Classify the Cases

Which of these are rites of passage? Does each mark a separation, an incorporation, or both?

- A child’s first full-day fast in Ramadan, and the family’s celebration of it
- High-school graduation and the announcement of results
- The sequence from engagement to wedding
- The first salary, and what is customarily done with it
- National service, for those who complete it, and the first day in a white coat for medical students

The Life Course Approach

- **Life course approach** — a research orientation in which sociologists and other social scientists look closely at the social factors that influence people throughout their lives, from birth to death
- Life course researchers recognize that biological changes **shape but do not dictate** human behavior
- Several life events mark the passage to adulthood, including marriage and the birth of a first child; these turning points vary from one society, and even one generation, to the next

When Does Adulthood Begin?

- In the United States the key event seems to be the **completion of formal schooling**, but completion is less clearly defined than a generation ago: people take full-time jobs while studying or return for certificates and advanced degrees
- Leaving home, finding a stable job, and establishing a long-term relationship no longer occur at specific ages (Silva 2012; T. Smith 2003)
- Result: no clear dividing line between adolescence and adulthood. Few young people finish school, marry, and leave home at about the same age
- New terms describe the prolonged ambiguous status of people in their 20s: **youthhood**, **emerging adulthood**, **pre-adult**, **not quite adult** (Gilmore 2019)

Use Your Sociological Imagination: Which Milestone Marks Adulthood?

Why might the end of formal schooling be the most important milestone of adulthood today? What about marriage, full-time employment, or financial independence? Which milestone matters most?

- In Kuwait, is adulthood marked by graduation, the first job, marriage, the first child, or something else?
- Living with one's parents until marriage is common here. Is that a *delay* of adulthood, or evidence that the milestone list itself is local?
- Who decides when you count as an adult: the state, your family, your employer, or you?

Anticipatory Socialization and Resocialization

- The development of a social self is a lifelong transformation that begins in the crib and continues as one prepares for death
- Two types of socialization recur throughout the life course

TWO KINDS OF SOCIALIZATION ACROSS THE LIFE COURSE

Anticipatory socialization

Rehearsing for future positions, occupations, and relationships

High school students touring a university online before enrolling

Direction: forward, adding new norms

Resocialization

Discarding former behavior patterns and accepting new ones

Reform schools, therapy groups, prisons, religious conversion settings

Direction: unlearning first; more stress

Anticipatory Socialization: Rehearsing a Future Role

- **Anticipatory socialization** — processes of socialization in which a person rehearses for future positions, occupations, and social relationships
- A culture functions more smoothly when members learn the norms, values, and behavior of a status **before** assuming it
- It begins in childhood and adolescence and continues as we prepare for new responsibilities
- High school students once studied college brochures or visited campuses; now universities build websites with virtual tours and audio clips of everything from the anthem to a sample zoology lecture
- Your internships, clinical rotations, site visits, and this course itself are anticipatory socialization for roles you do not yet hold

Resocialization: Unlearning an Established Orientation

- Assuming a new social or occupational position sometimes requires us to **unlearn** an established orientation
- **Resocialization** — the process of discarding former behavior patterns and accepting new ones as part of a transition in one's life
- It often occurs during an explicit effort to transform an individual: reform schools, therapy groups, prisons, religious conversion settings
- The prisoner-firefighters are a case of resocialization
- Resocialization typically involves considerable stress, much more than socialization in general or even anticipatory socialization (Gecas 2004)

Goffman’s Total Institution

- **Total institution** — Goffman’s term for an institution that regulates all aspects of a person’s life under a single authority, such as a prison, the military, a mental hospital, or a convent
- Cut off from the rest of society, it provides for all its members’ needs and often becomes a miniature society

Test case: the K-pop trainee system. Agencies sign recruits in their mid-teens, house many in company dormitories, schedule training from morning until late night, cut trainees at monthly evaluations, and monitor weight, phones, and dating. How many of the four traits does it satisfy, and which does it miss?

Degradation Ceremonies Strip Away Individuality

- People often lose their individuality within total institutions
- **Degradation ceremony** — an aspect of the socialization process within some total institutions, in which people are subjected to humiliating rituals
- A person entering prison is stripped of clothing, jewelry, and other personal possessions
- From that point, scheduled routines allow little or no personal initiative; the individual becomes secondary and rather invisible in the overbearing social environment (Garfinkel 1956)

Resocialization is most effective inside a total institution precisely because the institution controls the whole mirror.

The Prisoner-Firefighters Explained with the Chapter's Concepts

Use the vocabulary to explain what "healed" Sammy in the restaurant.

- **Total institution** and **degradation ceremony**: the prison defined and maintained the identity "criminal"
- **Resocialization**: the fire crew demanded new skills, judgment, and public contact
- **Looking-glass self**: a town that stands and applauds is a different mirror from a cell block
- **Generalized other** and **impression management**: the crew let the public read them as firefighters, and the reading stuck
- Now argue two ways. **Functionalist:** resocialization returns a member to a valued role. **Conflict:** prisoners fighting wildfires is also inexpensive, dangerous labor by a captive workforce. Who benefits from each identity?

Thinking Critically: Your Own Anticipatory Socialization

What examples of anticipatory socialization did you experience as a child or teenager? What examples are you currently experiencing?

- Childhood: playing doctor, teacher, or shopkeeper; being told “when you are older you will…”
- Adolescence: choosing a major because of what you imagined the job would be like
- Now: lab coats, internships, LinkedIn profiles, learning how engineers or physicians or managers talk
- What have you already begun to **unlearn** since starting university?

Role Transitions throughout the Life Course

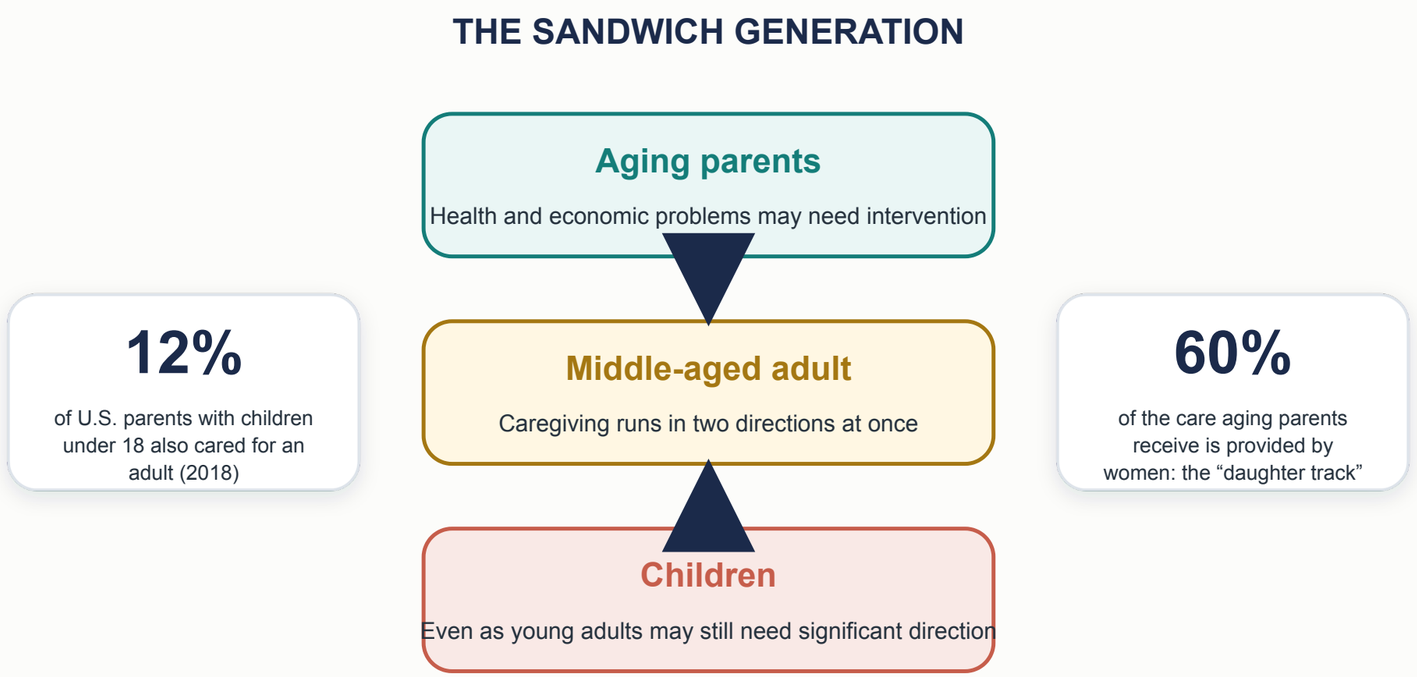
We do not experience the same things the same way at different points in the life course. Midlife, caregiving, and retirement are social transitions, not only biological ones.

Levinson’s Transitions and the Midlife Crisis

- Psychologist Daniel Levinson identified a transitional stage when an individual gradually **enters the adult world**: moving out of the parental home, beginning a career, or entering a marriage
- The next transition, the **midlife transition**, typically begins at about age 40
- **Midlife crisis** — a stressful period of self-evaluation that begins at about age 40, in which people realize they have not achieved basic goals and ambitions and have little time left to do so
- Levinson (1978, 1996) found that most adults surveyed experienced tumultuous midlife conflicts, within the self and with the external world
- The last major transition occurs after age 60, sometimes well after, given better health care and longer lives
- How we move through the life course varies with preference and circumstance, shaped by class and gender; only in general terms can we speak of stages

The Sandwich Generation

- **Sandwich generation** — adults who simultaneously try to meet the competing needs of their parents and their children



Livingston 2018; National Alliance for Caregiving 2015

The “daughter track”: middle-aged women, and younger, find their time and attention diverted by the needs of aging mothers and fathers (Livingston 2018; National Alliance for Caregiving 2015).

Retirement Is a Rite of Passage, Increasingly Delayed

- You enter the labor force, work until a certain age, and retire: a rite of passage marking a critical transition. Increasingly, people delay retirement or move into a different type of job
- About **40 percent** of people 55 and older are working or looking for work; the labor force participation rate is projected to grow fastest among people **65 to 74** and **75 and older**
- More than **42 percent** of workers 55+ are in management, professional, and related occupations, and older workers have higher rates of self-employment (Toossi and Torpey 2017)
- Why the reversal? Changes in Social Security benefits, economic uncertainty, worries about health insurance and pensions, plus longer lives and better health (Toossi 2012)

Retirement in Kuwait Runs the Other Way: Citizens and Expatriate Workers

- A Kuwaiti employee can draw a pension after **30 years' service (men) or 25 (women) with no age condition**, or at age 55 (men) or 50 (women) with 15 years; the 2019 early-retirement law lowered the cost of the earliest exits (PIFSS; KUNA 2019)
- More than **four in five** employed Kuwaitis work in the government sector (CSB labour market data, 2024). The IMF noted that the early-retirement age for civil servants was lowered by five years partly to make room for new graduates, widening the pension fund's actuarial gap to about **45 percent of GDP** (IMF 2020)
- Schaefer's reasons for delay (benefit cuts, insurance worries, economic uncertainty) largely do not apply when the pension is state-guaranteed and health care is public. The timing of retirement follows institutions, not only preference
- Expatriate workers sit outside the pension system: they receive an **end-of-service indemnity**, not a pension, and residence depends on a work permit, so for many, retirement means leaving Kuwait. From 2020 to late 2024 a separate rule restricted or added fees to permit renewals for workers aged 60 and over without a university degree, before it was cancelled (PAM Decision 294/2023, revoked November 2024)

Atchley's Phases of Retirement

Gerontologist Robert Atchley (1976)

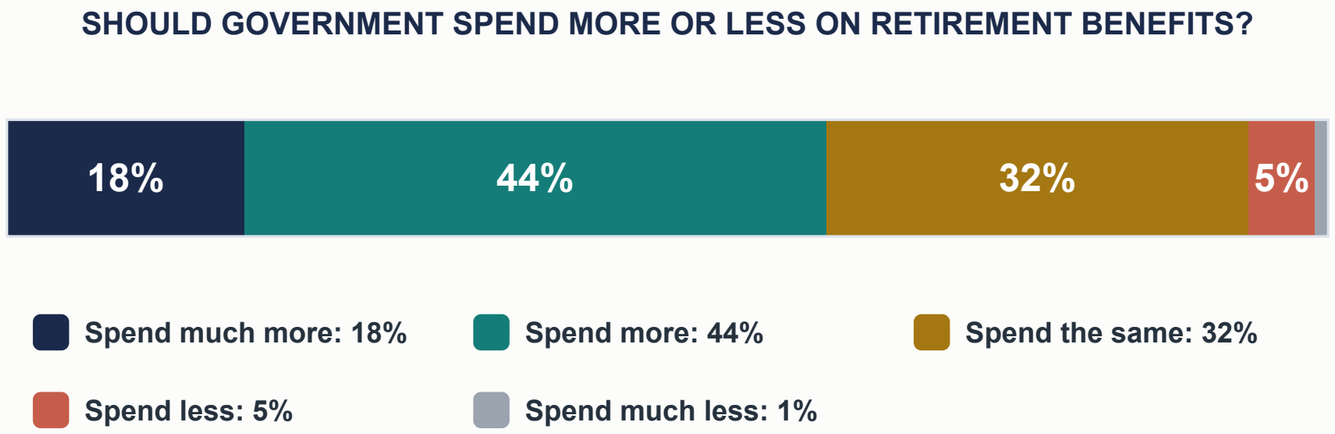
Phase	Description
Preretirement	A period of anticipatory socialization as the person prepares for retirement
Near phase	The person establishes a specific departure date from his or her job
Honeymoon phase	An often euphoric period in which the person pursues activities he or she never had time for before
Disenchantment phase	Retirees feel a sense of letdown or even depression as they cope with new lives that may include illness or poverty
Reorientation phase	The development of a more realistic view of retirement alternatives
Stability phase	The person has learned to deal with life after retirement in a reasonable and comfortable fashion
Termination phase	Begins when the person can no longer engage in basic day-to-day activities such as self-care and housework

Retirement Is a Series of Adjustments, Not One Event

- The length and timing of each phase differ with financial status and health; a person will not necessarily pass through all of them (Reitzes and Mutran 2006)
- People who retire involuntarily or without the necessary means may never experience the honeymoon phase; many U.S. retirees take part-time jobs to supplement pensions
- The experience varies by gender and resources, so anticipatory socialization for retirement is unevenly distributed

> If a Kuwaiti can retire in her late forties with thirty or more healthy years ahead, which of Atchley’s phases stretch, which compress, and which might be skipped?

Figure 4-1: Support for Government Spending on Retirement



62% want more or much more spending

Respondents were not asked where the extra revenue would come from

Source: 2016 survey data in NORC 2019

Should the government do more for retirees? Sixty-two percent of Americans said yes. Nobody asked them who would pay (NORC 2019). The same thing happens here: a pension increase is always popular, and the IMF estimates Kuwait's pension fund is short by about 45 percent of GDP (IMF 2020). Ask people about benefits without mentioning costs and they will say yes every time. Remember that from Chapter 2 when you read a survey.

Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities in the U.S., Aging at Home in Kuwait

- **Naturally occurring retirement community (NORC)** — an area that has gradually become an informal center for senior citizens
- Rather than nursing homes or planned retirement communities, many older Americans **age in place**; NORCs account for an estimated **17 to 25 percent** of people 65 or older, from a single apartment building to a city neighborhood, and businesses serving the elderly follow the customers
- Some are threatened by **gentrification**, the takeover of low-income neighborhoods by higher-income residents; residents lose not only housing but a community (Gregor 2013; Piturro 2012)

- Kuwait has aging in place by law rather than by drift. Law 18 of 2016 makes family care of elders a legal duty, in order: spouse, then children, grandchildren, siblings. When its regulations were issued, the Ministry of Social Affairs' residential home housed about **30** elders while mobile home-care served more than **3,200**, and admission is restricted so as not to "encourage family breakdown" (Ministry of Social Affairs 2016)

Thinking Critically: Dependent Adult Children and Dependent Parents

Many young adults live with their parents after finishing school. Contrast their situation with that of the elderly who live with their children. Does society treat dependent adult children the same way as dependent parents?

- In Kuwait, where do most elders live and spend their days? Where do unmarried graduates live?
- Which arrangement is read as normal, which as a problem, and by whom?
- How have people close to you handled retirement from the labor force?

Social Policy and Sociological Research: Child Care around the World

Child care programs are not babysitting. They are an agent of socialization with enormous influence on young children, and societies disagree about who should provide and pay for them.

Looking at the Issue: Who Cares for Preschoolers?

- The rise in single-parent families, job opportunities for women, and the need for additional income have moved mothers of young children into the working world; in most countries, preschoolers are no longer cared for only by their parents during the day
- **Worldwide**, fewer than one in three children aged 3 to 4 attend any early childhood education programme; in the **Middle East and North Africa** the figure is about one in four (UNICEF)
- Only **57 of 178** countries guarantee any childcare for children aged 0 to 2. Between the end of parental leave and the start of childcare lies a “childcare policy gap” averaging **4.2 years**, filled by unpaid family work or, as the ILO puts it, “reliance on domestic workers” (ILO 2022)
- **Kuwait:** public kindergarten from age 4 is free for citizens but not compulsory, and about two-thirds of the age group are enrolled in pre-primary (UNESCO 2019). Below age 4, care is mostly private: roughly **460** licensed nurseries under the Ministry of Social Affairs, employer nurseries where the labour law requires them, grandparents, and about **781,000** domestic workers nationwide (PACI, end of 2024)

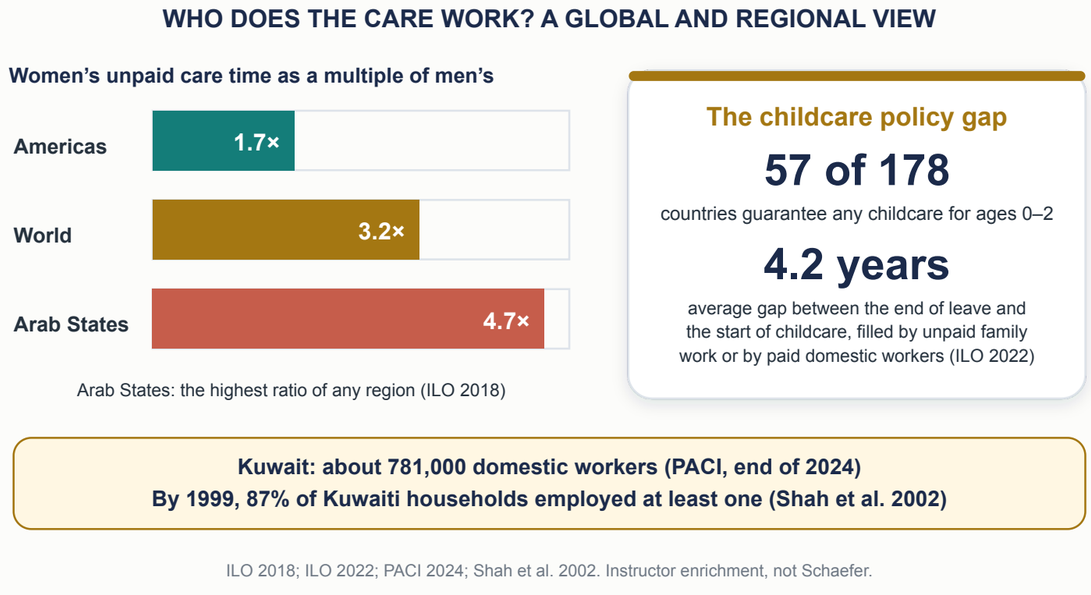
> Who should care for the children of working mothers during working hours?

Research Finds High-Quality Child Care Does Not Harm Socialization

- High-quality child care centers do not adversely affect children's socialization; good day care **benefits** children
- U.S. studies found no significant differences between infants with extensive nonmaternal care and those cared for solely by their mothers; the overall quality of arrangements has improved (Campbell et al. 2014; NICHD 2007)
- Generalizing is difficult because providers and state policies vary so much
- The coronavirus pandemic exposed the need: when schools closed, health, food-supply, and transport workers still needed care for their children. Child care workers were suddenly "essential," though they rarely received the hazard pay given to other essential workers (Goldstein and Bosman 2020)

Applying Sociology: Four Perspectives on Child Care

- **Interactionist:** quality lives in face-to-face interaction between carer and child, a micro-level question with macro-level consequences for the family
- **Functionalist:** in Scandinavia, subsidized day care introduces children from immigrant families to the values and culture of their new country; Denmark considered requiring children in poor, mostly immigrant neighborhoods to attend day care 25 hours a week (*The Economist* 2019b)
- **Conflict:** quality care is easier to find in affluent communities; the poorest U.S. families spend 25 percent of income on preschool care, others 6 percent or less
- **Feminist:** care is dismissed as “merely a way to let women work”; 97 percent of U.S. child care workers are women, paid about $11 an hour



Initiating Policy: Child Care Policies Vary Worldwide

- Most developing nations lack the economic base for subsidized care; working mothers rely on relatives or take children to work
- In western Europe, government provides child care as a basic service at little or no cost, though even subsidized systems fall short of demand
- In **Sweden and Denmark**, one-half to two-thirds of preschoolers are in government-subsidized care full-time
- In the **United States**, 2019 annual fees for full-time infant care ranged from **$5,760** in Mississippi to **$20,880** in Massachusetts (Child Care Aware 2020)
- In **Japan**, married mothers traditionally left the labor force; day care has not kept pace. Policymakers ask, “Is your work so important that you must put your baby in childcare? Why are you being so self-centered?” One private center had a waiting list of **25,000** children (Tabuchi 2013)
- In Europe, **53 percent** of women report not working or working part-time because care is too expensive; another **25 percent** cannot find it (Janta 2014)

Take the Issue with You: Who Should Pay for Child Care?

Should the costs of day care be paid by government, by the private sector, or entirely by parents?

- Were you ever in a nursery or day care program? Do you recall it as good or bad? Is it desirable to expose young children to the socializing influence of day care?
- Conflict theorists say child care receives little support because it is “merely a way to let women work.” Can you think of other explanations?
- Optional: in Kuwaiti households, young children may be cared for by parents, grandparents, nurseries, or hired caregivers. What does each arrangement mean for who socializes the child, and in which language?

Socialization in Your Life and Your Field

What looked like individual choice, who you are, when you grew up, how you present yourself, turns out to follow social patterns that can be named.

Sociology in Your Major

SOCIALIZATION IN YOUR FIELD

Medicine

Attachment research
Screen-time guidance
Residency as anticipatory socialization

Engineering

Site induction and safety culture are resocialization of reflexes, not only skills

Business

The interview is impression management
Onboarding is the workplace agent at work

Computer science

Platforms are agents by design: feeds, defaults, and privacy controls shape users

Medicine: attachment research sits behind pediatric practice, the screen-time guidance is applied socialization research, and residency is anticipatory socialization inside something close to a total institution. Engineering: onboarding and safety culture are resocialization. Business: the interview is impression management under examination; plan for the 12-jobs finding. Computer science: platforms are agents of socialization by design.

Before You Leave

- Heredity and environment **interact**: Isabelle and the orphans show what happens without interaction; the twins keep the genes honestly in the picture
- The self is **created** through others' imagined judgments (Cooley), **develops** through role taking toward the generalized other (Mead), and is **presented** to audiences (Goffman); Freud adds inborn drives
- Seven **agents** carry socialization for life: family, school, peers, media and technology, workplace, religion, the state
- Societies mark transitions with **rites of passage**, prepare us through **anticipatory socialization**, and sometimes rebuild us through **resocialization**, most completely inside a **total institution**
- Midlife, the sandwich generation, and retirement are social transitions; child care is socialization policy

Next: Chapter 5, Social Interaction, Groups, and Social Structure. What happens when socialized selves meet?