Learning Objectives

5.1 Describe the development of the self.
5.2 Discuss the concept of the individual as performer.
5.3 Explain the significance of socialization in childhood and adulthood.
5.4 Describe the key aspects of interaction with others.
5.5 Identify micro-level social structures.
Socialization and Variance

Mack Beggs won his weight class in the Texas state wrestling championships in February 2017—in the girls’ league . . . and he won it again the following year. Mack is a 18-year-old transgender boy, but state rules bar him from competing in the boys’ league. The rules say that boys cannot compete against girls and that students are required to compete as the gender noted on their birth certificate. After Beggs’s final competition in an undefeated season, the crowd erupted in both cheers and boos.

Beggs, who began transitioning a year and a half prior to the 2017 championship, has been taking testosterone as part of that process. Some felt that he shouldn’t have been competing against girls because the added testosterone gave him an unfair advantage. A few parents even attempted legal injunctions to prevent Beggs from competing. Ignoring the controversy, Beggs credited his success to his teammates, noting that they all worked hard together. While the public, schools, and politicians debate the fluidity of gender, transgender students like Beggs face pressure to fit in with the social expectations of their peers, their families, and the wider world—and the repercussions when they don’t.

The majority of transgender students from kindergarten through twelfth grade who are out or perceived as transgender while in school experience some form of mistreatment. In 2015, 54 percent acknowledged being verbally harassed, 24 percent said they had been physically attacked, and 13 percent were sexually assaulted because they were transgender. Some (17 percent) experienced such severe treatment that they left school. Such mistreatment due to gender identity or expression is not restricted to peers and schools but may also pervade family and work life. Transgender people have an attempted suicide rate nine times that of the general U.S. population.

Yet despite sometimes violent disapproval from the dominant society, many transgender people continue to express their gender identity (see Trending box, Chapter 11). Research suggests a biological basis for transgender identity. At the same time, behavior and experiences are as influential as biology. You are who you are because of the people, institutions, and social structures that have surrounded you since birth (and that have been in play even before then). You have been socialized to look, think, act, and interact in ways that allow you to live harmoniously, at least most of the time, with those around you. However, at times you may come into contact with those who socialize you into ways at variance with the dominant culture. In extreme cases, such socialization can lead to actions such as those taken by abusers of transgender people. Discovering how socialization and social interaction shape who we are and how we act, as we do in this chapter, is the most basic level of sociological analysis. But, in fact, sociologists are concerned with everything along the micro–macro continuum, which was introduced in Chapter 1. That includes the individual’s mind and self; interactions among individuals; and interactions within and between groups, formally structured organizations, entire societies, and the world as a whole, as well as all the new global relationships of the “global age.”

Sociology’s micro–macro continuum means that rather than being clearly distinct, social phenomena tend to blend into one another, often without our noticing. For example, the interaction that takes place in a group is difficult to distinguish from the group itself. The relationships between countries are difficult to distinguish from their regional and even global connections. Everything in the social world, and on the micro–macro continuum, interpenetrates.

This chapter and the next introduces you, at least briefly, to the full range of sociological concerns along the micro–macro continuum. We start with the smallest-scale social phenomena and work our way to ever larger ones as these two chapters progress.

The Individual and the Self

Sociologists study individuals in general but rarely concern themselves with any particular individual. A primary sociological question is what, if anything, distinguishes humans as individuals from other animals. Some argue it stems from characteristics such as a larger brain or an opposable thumb. However, most sociologists believe the essential difference between humans and other animals is the human capability of having distinctive interaction with other humans.

An important source of this view is data about individuals who grew up in social isolation and did not experience normal human interaction during their development. For instance, we have information on cases in which children have been locked in closets or in single rooms for much or all of their childhoods (Curtiss 1977; Davis 1940, 1947). Five children, ages 2 through 13, were discovered by authorities in York, Pennsylvania. They had lived their entire lives with their parents in a single room in a private home without any functioning utilities; their water source was rain dripping through the roof. The children had no birth certificates and had received no formal schooling, and there was no evidence that they had ever received any medical care, including vaccinations. They suffered from physical and
mental health problems and were below average in terms of educational level (“Police Discover Five Children” 2010).

Of related interest is the existence of feral, or wild, children—that is, children who have been raised by animals in the wilderness (Benzaquen 2006; Dombrowski, Gischlar, and Mrazik 2011; Friedmann and Rusou 2015; Newton 2002). Feral children are generally unable to talk or to show much in the way of human emotion. On such child is Oxana Malaya from a small village in Ukraine (Grice 2006). In 1986, after being abandoned by her parents at age three, she crawled into a hovel that housed dogs. The “Dog Girl” lived there for five years before a neighbor reported her existence. When she emerged, she could hardly speak. Like the dogs she lived with, she barked, ate with her tongue, and ran about on all fours. Years later, when she was living in a home for the mentally disabled, Oxana was found to have the mental capacity of a six-year-old. She could not spell her name or read. She was able to communicate like other humans and talk because she had acquired some speech before she began living with dogs. She had also learned to eat with her hands and to walk upright (Lane 1975; Shattuck 1980). She eventually had boyfriends, although it is doubtful she has the emotional ability to develop long-term relationships.

Oxana has done better than other feral children (Lane 1975; Shattuck 1980). Long after another little feral girl was discovered, efforts to socialize her had been only minimally successful. For example, she persisted in spitting and blowing her nose near and on other people (Curtiss 1977).

The overall conclusion from the literature on feral children and those raised in isolation is that people do not become human, or at least fully human, unless they are able to interact with other people, especially at an early age.

The concept of feral children relates to the fundamental question of the relationship between nature and nurture. The “nature” argument is that we are born to be the kinds of human beings that we ultimately become; it is built into our “human nature” (Settle et al. 2010). The “nurture” argument is that we are human beings because of the way we are nurtured—that is, the way we are raised by other human beings, who teach us what it is to be human. Of course, both nature and nurture are important (Eagly and Wood 2017). However, the cases of feral children indicate that nurture is in many ways more important than nature in determining the human beings we become.

Symbolic Interaction and Development of the Self

As the example of feral and isolated children suggests, development as a human presupposes the existence of other humans and interaction with and among them. This brings us into the domain of symbolic interactionism, which developed many ideas of great relevance to this view of humans. In general, the interaction that takes place between parents and children is loaded with symbols and symbolic meaning.

One early symbolic interactionist, Charles Horton Cooley (1864–1929), explained how parents help children develop the ability to interact with others with his famous concept of the looking-glass self. This is the idea that as humans we develop a self-image that reflects how others see and respond to us. We imagine how we appear to others and how they evaluate our appearance. Based on that, we develop some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or embarrassment. Because children’s earliest interactions are typically with their parents, it is that interaction that is most important in the formation of a self-image. This helps explain why feral children and others who spend their formative years in prolonged social isolation are unlikely to form a fully developed self-image: There are no others to respond to them. It is as we interact with others, especially when we are young, that we develop a sense of our selves.

The major thinker associated with symbolic interactionism (see Chapter 2) is one of Cooley’s contemporaries, George Herbert Mead (1863–1931). Mead (1934 1962) was very concerned with the micro level (the individual, the mind, the self). He prioritized the social relationship, including interaction, and the importance of symbols in social interaction. In fact, it is this prioritization of the social that distinguishes sociologists from psychologists in their studies of individuals and interaction. We examine some of Mead’s more general ideas before turning to his thinking on development, especially development of the self.

George Herbert Mead’s ideas strongly influenced the development of sociological theory, especially symbolic interactionism. His most famous work, Mind, Self, and Society, originated as lectures from his teachings at the University of Chicago.
Humans and Nonhumans

Mead distinguished between humans and nonhumans. However, both are capable of making gestures (e.g., by raising a limb). By gestures, Mead meant the movements of one individual that elicit automatic and appropriate responses from another individual.

Both animals and humans are capable of not only gestures but also conversations of gestures, whereby they use a series of gestures to relate to one another. Thus, the snarl of one dog may lead a second dog to snarl in return. That second snarl might lead the first dog to become physically ready to attack or be attacked. In terms of humans, Mead gave the example of a boxing match, where the cocking of one boxer’s arm may cause the other boxer to raise an arm to block the anticipated blow. That raised arm might cause the first boxer to throw a different punch or even to hold back on the punch. A less aggressive example can be found in the realm of flirting (Delaney 2012; Henningsen 2004), where one person’s prolonged eye contact (a subtle gesture) may cause another person to return the eye contact. The returned gaze might cause the first flirter to look away and, perhaps, quickly glance again at the other person. As in the case of animals, the gestures of boxers and those who flirt (among many others) are instantaneous and involve few, if any, conscious thought processes.

In addition to physical gestures, animals and humans are both capable of vocal gestures. The bark of a dog and the grunt of a human (boxer) are both vocal gestures. In both cases, a conversation of vocal gestures is possible, as the bark of one dog (or the grunt of a boxer) elicits the bark (or grunt) of another. However, when humans (and animals) make facial gestures (such as originating eye contact in an effort to flirt), they cannot see their own facial gestures. In contrast, both animals and humans can hear their own vocal gestures. As a result, misunderstanding is more likely when people rely on facial rather than vocal gestures. For example, men may be more likely than women to interpret making eye contact as sexual in nature.

**ASK YOURSELF**

In what ways do you interact with your pets in the same way you interact with humans? In what ways is the interaction different? Do you find it more satisfying to interact with people or with pets?

It is the vocal gesture that truly begins to separate humans from animals. In humans, but not other animals, the vocal gesture can affect the speaker as much and in the same way it does as the hearer. Thus, humans react to and interpret their own vocal gestures and, more important, their words. Furthermore, humans have a far greater ability to control their vocal gestures. We can stop ourselves from uttering sounds or saying various things, and we can alter what we say as we are saying it. Animals do not possess this capacity. In short, only humans are able to develop a language out of vocal gestures; animals remain restricted to isolated vocal gestures.

Many sociologists have come to reject the clear distinction between the abilities of animals and those of humans (Greenebaum and Sanders 2015). Some sociological work has examined symbolic interaction between humans and animals (Alger and Alger 1997; Irvine 2004).

Symbolic Interaction

Of greatest importance in distinguishing humans from animals is a kind of gesture that can be made only by humans. Mead calls such a gesture a significant symbol, a gesture that arouses in the individual making it a response of the same kind as the one it is supposed to elicit from those to whom it is addressed. It is only with significant symbols, especially those that are vocal, that we can have communication in the full sense of the term. In Mead’s view—although more and more research on animals tends to contradict it (Gehart and Huber 2002; Gillespie-Lynch et al. 2013)—ants, bees, dogs, and apes are unable to communicate by means of such symbols.

Over time, humans develop a set of vocal significant symbols, or language. According to Mead, language involves significant symbols that call out the same meaning in the person to whom an utterance is aimed as they do in the person making the utterance. The utterances have meaning to all parties involved. In a conversation of gestures, only the gestures are communicated. With language, both the (vocal) gestures and the meanings are communicated. One of the key functions of language is that it makes the mind and mental processes possible. To Mead, thinking (and the mind; see the following section) is nothing more than internalized conversations individual humans have with themselves. It is little different from talking to other people.

Symbols also make possible symbolic interaction, or interaction based on significant symbols. This allows for much more complex interaction patterns than those that occur where interaction is based only on gestures. Because people can think about and interpret significant symbols, they can interact with large numbers of people and make complex plans for future undertakings. They can interpret the symbolic meaning of what others say and do and understand, for example, that some of them are acting in accord with their own plans. Animals lack the ability to make and understand complex plans.

**ASK YOURSELF**

What did George Herbert Mead mean by saying that thinking is so much like talking to yourself that it is little different from talking to other people? Do you agree with him? Why or why not? Think of some examples and counterexamples.
However, since Mead’s day, a great deal of research has demonstrated that many animals, especially primates, are able to think (Rowlands and Monso 2017; Young and Thompson 2013). That is, they can plan and calculate, in at least a rudimentary way (Ristau 1983; Schmitt and Fischer 2009). For instance, scrub jays engage in planning behavior to store away diverse caches of food that they will not eat until the following morning (Raby et al. 2007). Meerkats, which often prey on poisonous animals, teach their young how to deal with these potentially dangerous food sources by disabling the prey they present to young meerkats (Thornton and McAuliffe 2006). Chimpanzees demonstrate deceptive behavior when it helps them access foods they like (Woodruff and Premack 1979). Most of this research suggests that while animals think, human thought is much more complex (Premack 2007).

Mind and Self

Central to Mead’s ideas about the development of human beings, and the differences between humans and non-humans, are the concepts of mind and self. The mind is an internal conversation using words (and also images, especially, but certainly not only, for the autistic and the deaf; Fernyhough 2014; Grandin 2000). That internal conversation arises, is related to, and is continuous with interactions, especially conversations one has with others in the social world. Thus, the social world and its relationships and interactions precede the mind and vice versa. This perspective stands in contrast to the conventional view that prioritizes the brain and argues that we think first and then engage in social relationships. It also differs from the view that the mind and the brain are one and the same thing. The brain is a physiological organ that exists within us, but the mind is a social phenomenon. It is part of, and would not exist without, the social world. While the brain is an intracranial phenomenon, the mind is not.

The self is the ability to take oneself as an object. The self develops over time. Key to the development of self is the ability to imagine being in the place of others and looking at one’s self as they do. In other words, people need to take the role of others to get a sense of their own selves. There are two key stages in Mead’s theory of how the self develops over time, the play stage and the game stage.

1. Play stage. Babies are not born with the ability to think of themselves as having a self. However, as they develop, children learn to take on the attitudes of specific others toward themselves. Thus, young children play at being Mommy and Daddy, adopt Mommy’s and Daddy’s attitudes toward the child, and evaluate themselves as do Mommy and Daddy. However, the result is a very fragmented sense of the self. It varies depending on the specific other (e.g., Mommy or Daddy) being taken into consideration. Young children lack a more general and organized sense of themselves.

2. Game stage. Children begin to develop a self in the full sense of the term when they take on the roles of a group of people simultaneously rather than the roles of discrete individuals. Each of those different roles comes to be seen as having a definite relationship to all the others. Children develop organized personalities because of their ability to take on multiple roles—indeed, the entirety of roles in a given group. The developed personality does not vary with the individual role (Mommy, Daddy) a child happens to be taking. This development allows children to function in organized groups. Most important, it greatly affects what they do within specific groups.

Mead offers the example of a baseball game (or what he calls “ball nine”) to illustrate his point about the game stage of development. It is not enough in a baseball game for you to know what you are supposed to do in your position on the field. To play your position, you must know what those who play the other eight positions on the team are going to do. In other words, a player, every player, must take on the roles of all the other players. A player need not have all of those roles in mind all of the time; three or four of them will suffice on most occasions. For example, a shortstop must know that the center fielder is going to catch a particular fly ball; that he is going to be backed up by the left fielder; that because the runner on second is going to “tag up,” the center fielder is going to throw the ball to third base; and that it is his job as shortstop to back up the third baseman. This ability to take on multiple roles obviously applies in a baseball game, but it applies as well in a playgroup, a work setting, and every other social setting.

In a different example, from the college classroom, students are often asked to work together on group class presentations. Each student not only will have to prepare his or her part of the project and presentation but also will need to know and coordinate with what each of the other presenters, as well as the group as a whole, will do. He or she might have to know the content of each presentation and the sequence of presentations, along with the time allotted to each. Such group work resembles that of Mead’s
baseball team, where all members have to be familiar with and know the roles of all the others involved to be successful as a group. This is, in essence, what children learn in the game stage, and they continue to implement and practice this ability throughout their lives.

The Generalized Other

Mead also developed the concept of the generalized other, or the attitude of the entire group or community. The **generalized other** includes the roles, prescriptions, and proscriptions individuals use to develop their own behaviors, attitudes, and so forth. Individuals take the role of the generalized other. That is, they look at themselves and what they do from the perspective of the group or community. “What would people think if I . . .” is a question that demonstrates the role of the generalized other.

The generalized other becomes central to the development of self during the game stage. In the classroom example, the generalized other is the attitude of the group working on the collaborative project. In the family, to take still another example, it is the attitude of all family members.

In taking on the perspectives of the generalized other, children begin developing more fully rounded and complete selves. They can view and evaluate themselves from the perspective of a group or community and not merely from the viewpoints of discrete others. To have a coherent self, in the full sense of the term, as an adult one must become a member of a group or community. An adult must also be sensitive to the attitudes common to the community.

Having members who can take the role of the generalized other is also essential to the development of the group, especially in its organized activities. The group can function more effectively and efficiently because it is highly likely that individual members will understand and do what is expected of them. In turn, individuals can operate more efficiently within the group because they can better anticipate what others will do.

This discussion might lead you to think that the demands of the generalized other produce conformists. However, Mead argues that while selves within a group share some commonalities, each self is different because each has a unique biographical history and experience. Furthermore, there are many groups and communities in society and therefore many generalized others. Your generalized other in a baseball game is different from your generalized other in a classroom or in the family.

The “I” and the “Me”

Critical to understanding the difference between conformity and creative thinking and acting is Mead’s distinction between two aspects, or phases, of the self—the “I” and the “me.” The “I” and the “me” are not things; they do not exist in a physical sense. We would not find the “I” or the “me” if we dissected the brain. Rather, the “I” and the “me” are subprocesses involved in the larger thinking process. An individual sometimes displays more of the “I” aspect of the self and sometimes more of the “me” aspect. In any given instance, the relative mix of “I” and “me” determines the degree to which an individual acts creatively (more “I”) or more as a conformist (more “me”).

The “I” is the immediate response of an individual to others. It is that part of the self that is unconscious, calculable, unpredictable, and creative. Neither the person nor the members of the group know in advance what that response of the “I” is going to be. A daughter at a holiday dinner does not always know in advance what she is going to say or do, and the same is true of the other family members at the dinner table. That is what makes for frequent squabbles, if not outright battles, on such family occasions. As a result of the “I,” people often surprise themselves, and certainly others, with the unexpected things they say and do.

Mead greatly values the “I” for various reasons, including the fact that it is the source of new and original responses. In addition, the “I” allows a person to realize the self fully and to develop a definite, unique personality. The “I” also gives us the capacity to have an impact on the groups and communities in which we live. Moreover, in Mead’s view, some individuals, including the great figures in history, have a larger and more powerful “I.” They are therefore able to have a greater impact on their groups and communities, as well as on society and even on the globe.

The “me” is the organized set of others’ attitudes and behaviors adopted by the individual. In other words, the “me” involves the acceptance and internalization by the individual of the generalized other. While your “I” might dispose you to find inventive ways of introducing yourself to an attractive student in this class, your “me” might counter that impulse by reminding you that such socializing in the classroom is considered inappropriate by your social group (the generalized other, in this case). The “me” might lead you, then, to wait for someone to introduce you to that student or to find a way to run into that student outside of class. To Mead, the “me” involves a conscious understanding of what a person’s responsibilities are to the larger group. The behaviors associated with the “me” also tend to be habitual and conventional. We all have a “me,” but conformists have an overly powerful “me.”

It is through the “me” that society is able to dominate the individual. In fact, Mead defines “social control” as the dominance of the “I” by the “me.” Through the “me,” individuals control themselves with little or no need for control by outside influences. In the “me” phase, however, individuals analyze and critique their own thoughts and actions from the point of view of the social group and what its criticisms are likely to be. Thus, in most cases, the group need not criticize individuals; they do it themselves. In other words, self-criticism is often, in reality, criticism by the larger society.

Nevertheless, people and society as a whole need both “I” and “me.” For the individual, the “me” allows for a comfortable existence within various social groupings. The “I” lends some spice to what might otherwise be a boring existence. For society, the “me” provides the conformity needed for stable and orderly interaction. The “I” is the source of changes in society as it develops and adapts to the shifting environment.
The Individual and the Self

While the “me” generally provides the individual with some comfort and security, that is less the case in consumer society (Trentmann 2016). The reason is that consumer society is all about change, and as a result the “me” is constantly changing. For example, one might be expected to adopt a given fashion at one time, but soon an entirely different fashion comes to be expected. Instead of attaining stability, “consumers must never be allowed to rest” (Bauman 1999, 38). Of course, the “I” always impels the individual in unpredictable directions, such as making unusual fashion statements. However, in consumer society both the “I” and the “me” are at least somewhat unpredictable. This serves to make many people uneasy because they lack, at least as far as fashion is concerned, the comfort of a strong and stable “me.”

While consumer society is not generally conducive to a stable “me,” the level of unpredictability is very much related to the individual’s position in the stratification system. Those in the middle class are likely to experience the most instability. As rapidly as they change, they are led to desire many more changes than they can afford to make. This is particularly true for females because the costs of being in style, especially for clothing, are much greater for them than they are for males. The upper class is also confronted with a rapidly changing world of consumption, but those in that class can afford to change whenever it seems necessary. The lower class can afford little, with the result that those in it are unable to change what they consume to any great degree. However, the lower class experiences the uneasiness associated with not being able to keep up with changing demands of the “me.”

**CHECKPOINT 5.1**

**Concepts of the Individual and the Self**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONCEPT</th>
<th>EXPLANATION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The looking-glass self</td>
<td>The idea that an individual develops a self-image that reflects the way in which others respond to him or her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The mind</td>
<td>An internal conversation that arises from, is related to, and is continuous with social interactions</td>
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<tr>
<td>The self</td>
<td>The sense of oneself as an object</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The generalized other</td>
<td>The attitude of the entire group or community internalized by an individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The “I”</td>
<td>An individual’s immediate response to others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The “me”</td>
<td>The organized set of others’ attitudes that an individual assumes</td>
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Impression Management

When people interact with others, they use a variety of techniques to control the images of themselves they want to project during their social performances. They seek to maintain these impressions even when they encounter problems in their performances (Manning 2005). Goffman (1959) called these efforts to maintain certain images impression management.

For example, in your sociology class you might typically project an image of a serious, well-prepared student. One night you might stay up late partying instead of completing your required reading. When the instructor asks a
question in class, you might try to maintain your image by pretending to take notes rather than raising your hand. Called on nonetheless, you struggle, in vain, to give a well-thought-out, serious answer to the question. The smiles and snickers of fellow students who know that you were out partying late the night before might disrupt the performance you are endeavoring to put on. To deflect attention from you to them, you might suggest that they try to answer the question.

Impression management relates directly to the plots of many movies. In the world of the 2014 movie Divergent (see also the 2015–2017 sequels, Insurgent, Allegiant, and Ascendant), most people live in one of five “factions,” while a few are relegated to a sixth group, “the Factionless,” which exists at the bottom of the social stratification system. Assignment to a faction is based, at least in part, on a test score, but some test results are inconclusive because the test takers defy categorization; they are “divergent.” To conceal their difference, which is generally considered unacceptable in their society, they engage in impression management. While all of us sometimes fail at impression management, the cost of failure to those who diverge—death—is much greater than is the cost to us in our social world.

However, in some cases—for example, Jews trying to pass as non-Jews in Nazi Germany—failure at impression management can have similarly dire consequences. While the idea of impression management is generally associated with face-to-face social interaction, it also applies to interaction on social networking sites. For instance, many people constantly change the pictures on their Facebook pages to alter the images of themselves being conveyed to others (Cunningham 2013). Others use social media platforms like Twitter to create personal brands, marketing their presentations of self to become popular or newsworthy (Brems et al. 2017).

ASK YOURSELF

What impression management activities do you undertake? Have they generally been successful? Do you see yourself performing more of these activities as time goes on or fewer? Why?

Front and Back Stage

Continuing the theatrical analogy, Goffman (1959) argued that in every performance there is a front stage, where the social performance tends to be idealized and designed to define the situation for those who are observing it. When you are in class, as in the previous example, you are typically performing on your front stage. Your audience is the teacher and perhaps other students. As a rule, people feel they must present an idealized sense of themselves when they are front stage (e.g., by giving that seemingly well-thought-out answer). Because this performance is idealized, things that do not fit the image must be hidden (such as the fact that you were partying the night before and are now unprepared to answer questions intelligently).

Also of concern to Goffman is the back stage. In the back stage, people feel free to express themselves in ways that are suppressed in the front (Cahill et al. 1985). Thus, after class you might well confess to your friends in the cafeteria that you had been partying and faked your answer to a question asked in class. If somehow your front-stage audience—the instructor, in this case—sees your back-stage performance, your ability to maintain the impression you are trying to project in the classroom, in the front stage, is likely to become difficult or impossible in the future.

The back stage plays a prominent role in our lives. For every one of our front-stage performances, there are one or more back stages where all sorts of things happen that we do not want to be seen in the front stage. For example, when summer camp is over, counselors are often “friended” by their former campers on Facebook. To allow the campers to stay in contact with them through Facebook, counselors might post limited, carefully edited profiles to special Facebook pages. These are, in effect, the counselors’ front stages for former campers. However, the counselors might also retain back-stage versions of their Facebook profiles that the ex-campers are unable to see.

The existence of two stages, front and back, causes us all sorts of tensions and problems. We are always afraid that those in the front stage will find out about our back stage, or that elements of the back stage will intrude on the front stage.

These ideas are central to Leslie Picca and Joe Feagin’s Two-Faced Racism: Whites in the Backstage and Frontstage (2007). The central point of this study of white college students is that what they say and do differs depending on whether they are in their front stage or back stage. When they are in their back stage with friends and family, as well as with other whites, they often feel free to talk and act in a blatantly racist manner. Examples include telling racist jokes and mocking minority group members. However, when they are in their front stage in a public setting, especially with African Americans present, what they say and do is very different. They may act as if they are blind to a person’s color or even be gratuitously polite to African Americans. Thus, while overt racism may have declined in the front stage of public settings, it persists in the back stage (Cabrera 2014; Sallaz 2010).

While the distinction between front and back stage is important, bear in mind that these are not “real” places, nor are they rigidly separated from one another. That is, what is the front stage at one point can become the back stage at another. Nevertheless, in general, people are most likely to perform in an idealized manner on their front stage when they are most concerned about making positive impressions. They are likely to perform more freely back stage, among those who are more accepting of less-than-ideal behavior and attitudes.
Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other (Basic Books, 2017)

Sherry Turkle

One controversial issue today is whether technology is contributing to a decline in meaningful social relationships. Some experts argue that technology can help us build and maintain social networks, but in Alone Together, Sherry Turkle offers a critical look at how an array of recent technologies are leaving us detached and afraid of face-to-face social interactions. Turkle finds that some people prefer interacting with social robots instead of real humans because they do not have to deal with unpredictable emotions that might make them feel vulnerable—robots love unconditionally, and they never die. These social robots are so technologically sophisticated that they can follow our gaze and even talk to us, making it seem like they can empathize and understand our feelings. Turkle warns that intimacy with machines is no substitute for human intimacy and that machine-human relationships cause us to reduce our expectations of other humans.

When we do engage in social interactions with other humans, many of us often do so using technology, such as smartphones or computers. These machine-mediated exchanges allow us to communicate quickly and conveniently but not very expressively. While communicating via text, social media, and e-mail can be practical, it is also more impersonal and less spontaneous than face-to-face interactions are. For example, announcing a pregnancy on Facebook might be efficient, but it might also be insensitive if a person has not personally told close family members and friends first. New technologies allow us to edit and manage our impressions more than we can during face-to-face interactions, even if we cannot always verify how our messages are interpreted. Our online audience generally does not challenge our performances and most likely confirms our impressions of ourselves by “liking” what we post (if they respond at all). Social media might provide us with thousands of virtual connections; however, most of these are weak ties that require nothing consequential from us. This is why many of us feel alone at the same time that we are digitally connected.


CHECKPOINT 5.2

Concepts of the Individual as Performer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONCEPT</th>
<th>EXPLANATION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dramaturgy</td>
<td>The idea that an individual’s social life is a series of dramatic performances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impression</td>
<td>Techniques individuals use to control the images of themselves they want to project during their social performances</td>
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Socialization

Socialization is the process by which an individual learns and generally comes to accept the ways of a group or a society of which he or she is a part. During the socialization process children develop a self as they
learn the need, for example, to take on the role of the generalized other. Socialization almost always involves a process of interaction, as those with knowledge and experience teach those with a need to acquire that knowledge or to learn from others' experiences (Grusee and Hastings 2015).

While socialization occurs throughout an individual’s lifetime, it can generally be divided into two parts. Socialization during childhood sets the course for a lifetime and has been a central focus for researchers. However, researchers have increasingly pointed to a variety of ways in which adults continue to learn how to function within their society. Perhaps the scholar most responsible for promoting the idea of socialization across the life course was Erik Erikson (1994), who proposed eight stages of socialization, beginning at birth and ending at death, each based on what he described as a fundamental “existential question.” For example, the final stage involves addressing the growing awareness of one’s mortality and contemplating whether one’s life has been meaningful and one’s major goals have been achieved.

**Childhood Socialization**

A central concern in the study of socialization is those who do the socializing, or the agents of socialization. The first and often most effective agents of socialization are the child’s parents, as well as other family members and friends. These are defined as primary agents of socialization. In addition, broader, less personal influences, such as the educational system, the media (Prot et al. 2015), and consumer culture, are important in socialization. These are defined as secondary agents of socialization. All play a part in creating an individual who can effectively operate within and shape culture. Except for education, which is discussed in Chapter 13, we examine each of these various agents of socialization in the following sections.

**Family**

In a process known as primary socialization, newborns, infants, and young children acquire language, identities, cultural routines, norms, and values as they interact with parents and other family members (Laible, Thompson, and Froimson 2015). This socialization lays the foundation for later personality development. Early socialization performs various functions for society, such as equipping the young to fit better into society and perpetuating the culture from one generation to the next.

In addition to a great deal of primary socialization, parents provide anticipatory socialization—that is, they teach children what will be expected of them in the future. Anticipatory socialization is how parents prepare children for the important developmental changes (puberty, for example) they will experience. Among the many other things that must be anticipated in family socialization are entrance into grade school, high school, college, the work world, and life as an independent adult. Anticipatory socialization is especially important in societies and in time periods undergoing a great deal of change. Children need to be prepared not only for changes within society but also for changes within the family and changes that will affect them more directly.

Many assumptions about primary and anticipatory socialization are changing dramatically as the nature of families and the way in which they are understood culturally undergo major transformations. The socialization process was thought to be rather straightforward when the ideal of the nuclear family, composed of a mother, a father, and two or more children all living in the same home, predominated, as it did throughout much of the twentieth century. The lesson children were required to learn, at least as far as the family was concerned, was that when they became adults, they would go on to reproduce the same kind of nuclear family as the one in which they grew up. However, assumptions about the goodness and inevitability of the nuclear family and the ease of the socialization process now seem impossible to accept (McLanahan 1999). This is the case because of increasing public awareness of the many problems associated with the nuclear family, such as divorce, abuse, and unhappiness (see Chapter 12).

Then there is the expansion of what were at one time called “alternative family forms” (e.g., single-parent households, grandparents as primary caregivers) and the increasing centrality of day care centers and their workers to the socialization process (Patterson, Farr, and Hastings 2015). The agencies doing the socializing today are much more complex and varied than they were in the era of the predominance of the nuclear family. As a result, socialization is not as straightforward as it once was thought to be. In addition, it is no longer possible to think of a seamless relationship between the agencies of socialization and the socialization process. For example, the family may be socializing its children in one way, but the day care center may be doing it very differently.

At one time socialization was seen as one-directional, for example, from parent to child. Current thinking sees such socialization among intimates as two-directional, even multidirectional, with parents socializing children and children socializing parents, other adults, and families (Gentina and Muratore 2012). Children tend to be far more familiar with the latest advances in digital technology than their elders are, and they teach their parents much about both the technology itself and the digital culture. Another example is found in the large number of immigrant families in the United States and elsewhere. Children in these families are more likely than their parents to learn the language and culture of their new country (often in school). As a result, they are frequently the ones to teach, or at least try to teach, that knowledge to their parents (Mather 2009). This is reverse socialization, in which those who are normally being socialized are instead doing the socializing.
The self is not fixed. It changes over the course of our lives and even daily, depending on the nature of the impression we want to make on others (Goffman 1959). The self also changes with large-scale transformations in the social world, and no change has been more dramatic than globalization.

Globalization brings with it the increasingly easy movement of all kinds of objects, ideas, and knowledge, as well as of people. This mobility is of great importance in itself (Urry 2007) and because “the globalization of mobility extends into the core of the self” (Elliott and Urry 2010, 3). More generally, there is growing interest in the psychology of globalization (McKenzie 2018).

On the positive side, the self can become more open and flexible as a result of all the new experiences associated with the global age. The many brief interactions that happen, for example, online or through travel can lead to a different kind of self, perhaps more oriented to the short-term and the episodic than to that which is long-term or even lifelong.

Of great concern, however, are the negative effects of globalization on the self. At the extreme, Lemert and Elliott (2006) see globalization as “toxic” for the individual, including the self. Because people are increasingly mobile, they are likely to feel that their selves are dispersed and adrift in various places in the world or exist even more loosely in global cyberspace. While in the past the self was increasingly likely to be shaped by close personal relationships, it is now more likely to reflect the absence of such relationships and a sense of distance, even disconnection, from others. At the minimum, this can lead to a different kind of self than what existed before the global age. At the maximum, it can lead to one that is weak because it is untethered to anything strong and long lasting.

A more familiar pathology associated with the global age is being obsessed with digital mobile technologies. For one woman, the experience of being so deeply enmeshed in these technologies “has left the self drained and lifeless” (Elliott and Urry 2010, 41). Most people will not be affected as strongly or as adversely as this. However, globalization and its associated mobility have had a great effect on the self, and that impact is likely to grow exponentially in the future.

Think About It
Is the self today shaped more by the absence of close personal friendships and a sense of distance from others than by close personal relationships? What might be some of the negative effects of this change, if it is real? How could society counteract them?

Globalization

Does digital technology make it increasingly possible to be alone among a group of friends? While we clearly gain much from such technologies, what do we lose? Are the gains worth the losses?

Chapter 13 for a discussion of the role of schools and teachers in the process of socialization. Here primary agents of socialization (peers) compete with secondary agents of socialization (teachers and other employees of the school system; Bukowski et al. 2015). Such informal socialization grows increasingly important as students progress through the school years, especially high school. Peers are also important sources of socialization in contexts outside of school, such as scouting groups and athletic teams (Bennett and Fraser 2000; Corsaro 2018; Fine 1987). For example, researchers have found that children involved in contact sports, such as football and wrestling, are socialized to be more physically aggressive in everyday life (Kreager 2007). Male students (and their friends) who participate in contact sports are likely to develop a different kind of self than those who do not participate. For example, they may be more aggressive, more competitive, and less likely to engage in prosocial behaviors.

ASK YOURSELF

Have you experienced any instances of reverse socialization? For instance, have you taught your parents how to use their smartphones or set up Facebook pages, or has a younger relative or friend introduced you to a new smartphone app? What was this experience like?

Peers
A good deal of socialization in school takes place informally, through children’s interaction with fellow students (see
sports such as football are more likely to get into serious fights than are nonathletic males or males involved in non-contact sports such as baseball, basketball, and tennis.

As the child matures and spends an increasing amount of time in the company of friends, peer socialization is increasingly likely to conflict with what is being taught at home and in school. Peer involvement in risky and delinquent behavior exerts an influence that is often at odds with the goals set forth by parents and educators (Gardner and Steinberg 2005; Haynie 2001). In Peer Pressure, Peer Prevention, Barbara Costello and Trina Hope (2016) examine the role of friends in both encouraging and preventing deviant or criminal behavior. Based on qualitative data that included analyzing 81 student papers on peer influence and 831 responses to two open-ended questions about peer pressure, they investigated a variety of peer influence mechanisms that had either negative or positive effects. For example, the emulation of an admired role model could have a positive peer influence if he or she set a good example or a negative one if he or she encouraged deviant behavior. Coercive tactics such as appeals to peer loyalty operated in a similar manner—if their peers were all drinking (or abstaining from drinking) study participants stated that they were likely to conform to demonstrate the strength of their friendships. Interestingly, several peer influence mechanisms were more prevalent in affecting deviant behaviors, such as the fear of the loss of status and the presence of onlookers. Costello and Hope emphasize that whether it was negative or positive the informal social control exerted by peer groups is important when examining childhood socialization.

Peer socialization continues to be important throughout the life course. For example, peers help us learn what we are expected to do at college (Brimeyer, Miller, and Perrucci 2006), at work (Montoya 2005), in social settings (Friedkin 2001), and in civic arenas (Dey 1997), as well as how to be sports fans (Melnick and Wann 2011).

Gender

Sociologists devote a great deal of attention to gender socialization, or the transmission of norms and values about what boys and girls can and should do (Leaper and Farkas 2015; McHale, Crouter, and Whiteman 2003).

Even before babies are born, their parents (and many others) start to “gender” them (Kane 2018). In the United States they do so by frequently buying blue clothing for boys and pink for girls. Parents often dress baby girls in frilly dresses and affix bows to their bald heads to signal to others that the babies are girls. These gender differences are reinforced by the toys children are often given by parents—trucks and soldiers for boys, dolls and dollhouses for girls. Boys may get toys and games organized around action, activity, and role-playing thought to be appropriate for boys. Girls may get toys and games focused on interactions, relationships, and less active play. Sociologist Emily Kane (2012) conducted in-depth interviews with more than 40 parents of preschoolers, asking about the children’s toys, clothing, and socialization, among other things. She found that while parents often want to challenge gender assumptions about what constitute appropriate toys and clothing for children, they are constrained by traditionally gendered structures and social institutions. As children grow up, they learn from their parents and other significant others (as well as the generalized other) what behaviors are considered appropriate and inappropriate for their gender. They also learn the consequences, or sanctions, for deviating from these expectations. For example, parents may give a girl a great deal of sympathy when she cries, whereas they may tell a boy to “be a man” and not cry after an injury. Boys may be expected to have an interest in sports, to play roughly with each other, and to be unable to sit still. Girls, in contrast, are expected to display more “ladylike” behaviors, such as sitting quietly and sharing. Many children come to see these traditional gender expectations as “natural” expressions of being male or female. Parents trying to raise boys are more likely to socialize them into narrow gender roles. They cite biology, or “nature,” as the reason for doing so. Parents also do so because they fear social sanctions if they socialize the boys differently.

The feminist movement of the 1970s challenged traditional notions about the socialization of boys and girls (Lorber 2000). Today, some parents pride themselves on their “gender-neutral” child-rearing (Auster 2016). They socialize their children without rigid adherence to traditional binary gender roles, rejecting the ideas that boys and girls are completely different (Martin 2005). Yet many parents continue to strongly discourage boys from expressing an interest in activities stereotyped as “for girls” (Kane 2006). Illustrating this difference, tomboy can be a positive term applied to a girl who likes physical activity and plays with boys. Sissy, in contrast, is a derogatory term applied to a girl who expresses an interest in quieter types of play or playing with girls (Thorne 1993). Traditional gender socialization remains especially strong for boys (Kane 2006). Advice about the differential socialization

Peers are highly influential in the socialization process, especially during adolescence and early adulthood. What role do you think fellow students play in your socialization? Which ones will most influence you?
of boys and girls continues to dominate child-rearing and parenting books, as well as other media (Martin 2005). One recent study found that by the time infants reach the age of 12½ months they already display preferences for stereotypically gendered toys (Boe and Woods 2017).

Historically, traditional socialization for gender roles has been reinforced in schools, sports, and the mass media. In schools, teachers and curricula once tended to support traditional gender norms, and peer groups were likely to be segregated by gender (Thorne 1993). In sports, girls and boys were channeled into different sports; for example, girls tended to play softball, while boys played baseball (Coakley 2007). When girls did play “male” sports, their efforts were often labeled differently; for instance, girls’ football competitions might be called “powderpuff” football. The passage in 1972 of Title IX of the U.S. Education Amendments, which bars discrimination on the basis of gender in educationally based sporting activities receiving federal funding, has changed such views dramatically. Since the passage of Title IX, women’s athletic activities in college and even in high school have become increasingly visible and, in some cases, more highly regarded as “real” sports. One of the best examples is women’s basketball at the collegiate level. More generally, both men and women are now more likely to seek to build muscular and athletic bodies.

**ASK YOURSELF**

Why do you think traditional ideas about gender role socialization in childhood remain strong in U.S. culture today? Do you foresee that they will ever give way entirely to more egalitarian norms? Why or why not?

The media, especially movies, TV, and video games, have also tended to reinforce children’s traditional gender role socialization. However, that, too, is changing. Television programs are increasingly featuring strong female characters (Game of Thrones, Big Little Lies, Veep), and numerous shows have featured female cops and police chiefs (CSI, Elementary, The Fall). Other TV shows featuring strong female leads in recent years include She’s Gotta Have It and The Handmaid’s Tale. Female action stars (Sigourney Weaver in the Alien movies, Angelina Jolie in most of her films, Michelle Rodriguez in The Fast and the Furious series) are increasingly likely to play strong and aggressive characters. Young-adult novels and the movies based on them often also have strong female leading characters, such as the extremely smart Hermione Granger in the Harry Potter series, Katniss Everdeen in the Hunger Games series, and Beatrice Prior in the Divergent series.

Change is less obvious in other settings. Malls reinforce traditional gender roles by offering separate shops for boys and girls and for men and women. The Disney theme parks offer highly differentiated attractions aimed at boys (Pirates of the Caribbean) and girls (It’s a Small World). Modern advertisements, both in print and on television, continue to feature men and women in their “traditional” roles—men are often shown fixing things around the house or doing hard labor, while women are shown cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the kids. Most video games are targeted at boys, while girls are offered computer games focused on facial makeovers and shopping. This media emphasis on female appearance is not new. Movies, television programming, and advertisements have been widely critiqued for decades for their unrealistic portrayal of women’s bodies (Cole and Daniel 2005; Milkie 1999; Neudorf et al. 2009). Magazines such as Rolling Stone have featured sexualized images of men on their covers, but they still use many more such images of women. More striking is the fact that the images of women have become increasingly sexualized over time (Hatton and Trautner 2011). A study of images of girls in the magazines Seventeen (1971–2011) and Girls’ Life (1994–2011) showed an increase in their sexualization over time. More specifically, there was an increase in the depictions of girls in low-cut tops and tight-fitting clothing, as well as a decrease in images of childlike girls in Girls’ Life (Graff, Murnen, and Krause 2013). Many of the action heroines (e.g., those in James Bond and X-Men movies) continue to embody traditional male preferences for female bodies: young, attractive, and slender. Young women comparing themselves with these versions of adult Barbie dolls become anxious about their own bodies. Media images of women may also reaffirm racial stereotypes, with young women of color often being sexualized or portrayed as poor and irresponsible (Collins 2004).

**Mass Media and New Media**

Until recently, much of the emphasis on the role of the mass media in socialization has been on the effects of television and 

![Image of Disney theme park](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

What do you think the impact will be of the increasing amount of time young children are spending looking at devices’ screens?
the enormous number of hours per week children spend in front of their TVs (Comstock and Scharrer 2007). TV remains an important socialization agent, especially for young children. However, it is clear that as children mature, especially in the middle and upper classes, more of their socialization is taking place via the computer, smartphones, tablets, video games, and other recent and emerging technologies (Rideout, Foehr, and Roberts 2010). As the range of media devices has expanded, so has the portion of time spent using them. In 2011, infants and children up to the age of 8 spent an average of 5 minutes on mobile devices, while in 2017 they spent an average of 48 minutes on such devices (Common Sense Media 2017). The percentage of young people who own their own media devices is high and, for the most part, increasing.

Of course, a world of wonderful information is available to children on the computer via Google and other forms of new media. However, there are also lots of worrying things online that children can easily find or stumble upon. In addition, access to computers has changed the viewing experience considerably. Watching TV programs or movies is a passive activity. Even when “adult themes” are presented, the child is an observer, not a participant. However, on computers and other new digital media, the child can play video games such as *Minecraft*, *Slime Rancher*, *Fortnite*, *Red Dead Redemption 2*, and *Call of Duty: Infinite Warfare*. Some of these games engage children in simulations of antisocial activities, such as stealing cars, evading police chases, and engaging in shootouts. Clearly, the nature of the socialization implicit in such games is at odds with the lessons parents and teachers wish to impart.

Smartphones and social networking sites play a role in socialization as well, mostly through the influence of peers (Ibáñez-Cubillas, Díaz-Martín, and Díaz-Martin 2017). A great deal of peer socialization also takes place via sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat (boyd 2014; Skoog, Sobring, and Bohlin 2015). On average, 1.5 billion people log onto Facebook daily, and among 18- to 24-year-olds 94 percent watch videos shared on YouTube and 78 percent use Snapchat, often more than once a day (Smith and Anderson 2018). All of this is so new, and new forms of media are emerging so rapidly, that it is hard to know exactly what role the new media will play in socialization in the future, but its role is likely to be increasingly powerful and pervasive.

**Consumer Culture**

Consistent with the emphasis on consumption in this book, and in the contemporary world, it is important to understand that children need to be socialized in order to consume, especially to devote a significant portion of their lives to consumption (Atkinson, Nelson, and Rademacher 2015). Like many other types of socialization, much of this takes place early on in the family (Meuleman and Lubbers 2016), in schools, and in peer groups. Of course, we must not ignore the role of marketing, especially to children, in how people learn to consume (Schor 2005).

However, much socialization now takes place at consumption sites themselves rather than in the family, in schools, or through advertisements. For example, preteens and teens spend a large amount of time at shopping malls, either with their families or, as they mature, on their own and in the company of peers. Although young people may be going to a movie in a mall’s multiplex or just “hanging out” at the mall rather than shopping, the fact remains that those activities take place in a setting devoted to shopping and consumption (Cook 2004; Rose 2010). Children readily learn the nuts and bolts of how to consume. They also learn various norms and values of consumption, especially to value the processes of consumption and shopping and the goods and services acquired through those processes. There is even a game, *Mall Madness*, designed to socialize children, especially girls, into the realities of shopping at a mall. In the game, the “mall” has 18 stores where players can use credit cards to shop. Children are thereby also socialized into credit card use. The object of the game is to be the first player to buy all six items on one’s shopping list and return to the game’s starting point. In other words, the winner in the game, and in much of consumer culture, is the best consumer.

There is also a toy line produced by Moose Toys oriented mainly to selling figurines called Shopkins to children (see www.shopkinsworld.com). More important, these products also aim at promoting unbridled consumption—“Once you shop . . . you can’t stop!”—both in the present and implicitly throughout the life span of those who first play with the toys as children. The immediate goal is to entice children into collecting as many Shopkins and as much associated paraphernalia as possible. A broader goal is implicit in the fact that the figurines are characters associated with a wide array of items that can be purchased in stores. Among them are Kooky Cookie (a chocolate chip cookie), Polly Polish (a bottle of nail polish), and Lippy Lips (a tube of lipstick).

*Most broadly, the goal is to encourage a lifetime of “hyper-consumption” (Ritzer 2012a).*

Online consumption and shopping sites (such as Amazon and eBay) are also socializing agents. Navigation and buying strategies are learned at digital retailers, and these have an effect on consumption in the brick-and-mortar world. For instance, many younger people who have grown up with online shopping are adept comparison shoppers. They are likely to compare products online and to search out the best possible deals before making purchases. Some storefront retailers have gone out of business as a result of online competition, further reinforcing the use of online retailers. Other largely storefront retailers (e.g., Walmart) have developed new hybrids of online and storefront retailing. They offer consumers the ability to buy online and then pick up their items at local outlets (Amazon has recently entered this market). The hope is that visits to local stores will lead consumers to make unplanned purchases. These new forms of retailing offer new ways of socializing young people into our culture of consumption.

Socialization into being a consumer also reinforces lessons about race, class, and gender (Ottes and Zayre 2012). In *Inside Toyland* (2006), Christine Williams shows that consumer choices—where to shop, what brands to buy, what products are appropriate for whom—contribute to the maintenance of social inequalities. Girls face pressure to consume beauty products that encourage them to live up to an idealized and usually unattainable level of female beauty.
(Wiklund et al. 2010). For example, the Barbie doll is often presented as an ideal form of the female body—one physically impossible to attain in real life. Such toys socialize children not only into a consumer culture but also into one that reproduces and reinforces harmful gender expectations.

**Adult Socialization**

A great deal of adult socialization takes place in later life as people enter the work world (Ellis, Bauer, and Erdogan 2015) and become independent of their families.

In one or more of your jobs, have you ever been involved in an orientation or training period or program? What occurred during this time that you could now classify as part of a workplace socialization process? How successful was it, and, thinking back, do you believe it could have been done better?

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**Workplaces**

At one time, socialization into a workplace was a fairly simple and straightforward process. Many workers were hired for jobs in large corporations (e.g., General Motors, U.S. Steel) and remained there until they reached retirement age. Especially for those who held jobs in the lower reaches of the corporate hierarchy, socialization occurred for the most part in the early stages of a career. Today, however, relatively few workers can look forward to a career in a single position within a single company. Increasing numbers of workers are changing employers, jobs, and even careers with some frequency (Bernhardt et al. 2001; Legerksi 2012). Each time workers change jobs, they need resocialization to unlearn old behaviors, norms, and values and to learn new ones. They can no longer rely (assuming it was ever possible) on what they learned as children, in school, or in their early years on the job.

Consider the findings of one study of U.S. workers’ experiences in the job market. The researchers found that the generation of workers who entered the labor market in the late 1980s were 43 percent more likely to change jobs during their lifetimes than the generation that began in the early 1960s (Bernhardt et al. 2001). Today, workers will hold an average of 12 jobs during their lifetime and average just 4.2 years per job (Doyle 2018). Millennials, in particular, tend to “job hop,” or work less than two years in a job position (Chatzky 2018). Clearly, workers are changing jobs more frequently and filling more different jobs over a lifetime.

Allison Pugh (2015) argues that this change in work has helped create a culture of insecurity—a “tumbleweed society”—that affects not just the economy and our jobs but also our personal relationships and self-identity. She discovered through her interviews with 80 mothers and fathers that this culture of insecurity profoundly shapes their expectations of commitment, loyalty, and obligation. Flexibility in the workplace has weakened employer commitment but not the work ethic of the labor force. Some workers value flexibility because it gives them more freedom and mobility. This is especially true for well-educated professionals, who are better positioned financially to relocate for a new job. But others, particularly unskilled males, feel angry that their hard work does not guarantee stable employment. Interestingly, this anger is directed not against their bosses but at themselves for being too dependent on their jobs. Pugh describes this as a “one-way honor system” that holds individual workers, not their employers, responsible for their job successes and failures.

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**Total Institutions**

At some point in their lives, many adults find themselves in some type of total institution (Gambino 2013; Goffman 1961a). A **total institution** is a closed, all-encompassing place of residence and work set off from the rest of society that meets all the needs of those enclosed in it.

A major example of a total institution is the prison. In 2018, 2.3 million Americans were housed in prisons and jails of various types (including, among others, military prisons and detention centers for immigrants; Wagner and Sawyer 2018). On initial entry into prison, inmates undergo formal resocialization in the form of being told the rules and procedures they must follow. However, of far greater importance is the informal socialization that occurs over time through their interactions with guards and especially with other inmates. In fact, other inmates often socialize relatively inexperienced criminals into becoming more expert criminals; prisons are often “schools for crime” (Lopez-Aquado 2016; Sykes [1958] 2007).

Another total institution is the military. Members generally live in military housing. They often eat together, share living quarters, and have access to all necessary services on the military base. They must follow strict rules of dress, conduct, physical appearance, and organization of their time. The image of the military as a total institution is especially clear in the films Full Metal Jacket (1987) and American Sniper (2014). For example, Full Metal Jacket depicts military recruits getting their heads shaved, a process that removes their control over their own appearance. They are also harassed and deindividualized by the barking orders of their infamous drill sergeant, who has complete authority over everything they do.

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**Other Aspects of Adult Socialization**

Adult socialization and resocialization take place in many other ways and in many other settings. For example, medical schools, law schools, and graduate schools of various types socialize their students to be doctors, lawyers, nurses, and members of other professions (Becker and Geer 1958; Granfield 1992; Hafferty 2009). Students have to learn the norms that govern their appearance; conduct; and
Cyberbullying

Bullying cuts across all age groups and occurs in all venues. It is especially common among teenagers in school and now, increasingly, on the internet (Simmons 2011). A recent Centers for Disease Control (2018) report found that 19 percent of high school students had been bullied on school property in 2017, and 15 percent had been bullied electronically through texting and social media. The end of a school day no longer marks the end of bullying and the suffering of the bullied. They can continue on into the night online.

Cyberbullying is the “willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices” (cited in Simmons 2011, 104). While cyberbullying involves both genders, teenage girls are more likely to be the targets, and to a lesser degree the perpetrators, of cyberbullying. This is true, in part, because girls are more likely to be online, especially to use social media such as Instagram and Twitter. The cyberworld, especially social media, is very much about relationships, and girls are particularly likely to engage in them on the internet. They are also more likely to wreck online relationships by being cyberbullies or have them wrecked by comments or images created by other cyberbullies. On Instagram, for example, they can easily find out who has the most followers or “likes” and use that information to humiliate the victim. Most instances of cyberbullying involve those known to the victim (e.g., a friend, a former boyfriend); few involve total strangers.

There are many attractions to cyberbullying in comparison to face-to-face bullying. Cyberbullying is faster and simpler and involves fewer complications than a physical assault. A click by a cyberbully will do the job and excludes eye contact, raised voices, and immediate material consequences. In addition, it leaves a near-permanent trail that others can follow later. The internet also offers a wide range of weapons to the cyberbully, such as attacking physical appearance, undermining romantic or social relationships, tagging humiliating or embarrassing photos, leaving vicious comments, and even suggesting that the target might want to kill himself or herself. Inhibitions are reduced or eliminated on the internet, and there are few deterrents to cyberbullying. More people can gang up on the target than is possible in face-to-face situations. Victims of cyberbullying “are more likely to experience anxiety, depression, school violence, academic trouble, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts” (Simmons 2011, 109). While bullying occurs online, it usually has roots in, and repercussions for, the social world and lives of those involved.

Engaging the Digital World

Examine at least two social media sites and record examples of what you would consider cyberbullying. Explain why you selected the examples you did. What do they have in common? What actions do you think could be taken to prevent cyberbullying?

A number of other situations lead to the need for adult socialization or resocialization (Brim 1968; Lutfey and Mortimer 2006; Wilson 1984):

- **Changes in societal values and norms.** Many aspects of American culture are experiencing rapid change. One aspect, as mentioned earlier, is gender stereotypes. One study of men who set out to participate in college cheerleading squads found that their sense of masculinity adapted to the highly feminized environment (Anderson 2005).

- **Family changes.** Separation, divorce, death of a spouse, and remarriage involve particularly important transitions for the adults involved, not just the children. They require considerable adult resocialization into new relationships, new household organization, and new public images. One significant change in the family is the growing number of households with children where the mother is the “breadwinner.” In 1960, only 11 percent of mothers were the sole source of income for their households, but in 2015, 42 percent held this role (Glynn 2016).
Geographic mobility. Job change, retirement, and migration are becoming increasingly likely. People undergoing any of these transitions must be resocialized into not only new physical environments but also new subcultures.

Changes associated with aging. As people age, they gradually become disengaged from work, which has implications for relationships and financial well-being. A retired person must become resocialized into this new status. People are also living much longer and therefore are likely to experience longer periods in which their health deteriorates. According to data from the 2013 Global Burden of Disease study (2015), American men have a life expectancy of 76.33 and women of 81.42, but their healthy life expectancy, or the years they can expect to live free from chronic disease, sickness, and disability, is only 65.84 and 68.61, respectively. It may be difficult for people who see themselves as competent adults to experience the significant impact of disability on the ways in which they interact with the world.

Because we live in a global age, it is clear that adults also need to be resocialized, probably many different times as they age, into this new and ever-changing world. Some global socialization occurs on the job. As employers increasingly seek a global market and establish global outposts, employees have more opportunities to experience other cultures. Global socialization is also aided by the internet, which, of course, is itself increasingly global. Interaction with global websites, news sources, and other people throughout the world by e-mail or on social networking sites plays an important role in global socialization. We are all socialized globally to participate in consumer culture (Poff 2010), and students experience global socialization through study-abroad programs.

Interaction

In the first part of the chapter, we focused on the socialization of individuals. However, socialization generally involves interaction, or social engagement involving two or more individuals who perceive, and orient their actions to, one another. Interaction has generally been seen as involving face-to-face relationships among people, but in the twenty-first century, interaction is increasingly mediated by smartphones and social media. Interaction is an important topic of study in itself because of its ubiquity and its influence on individuals. It is also a key building block for more macroscopic social phenomena, such as networks and groups as well as larger organizations, societies, and the global domain, which is explored more deeply in the next chapter.

Personal interaction occurs throughout our lifetimes. Examples include interactions between parents and children, between children and their siblings, between teachers and students, between coworkers, and between medical personnel and patients. Interactions early in the life cycle, especially in the family and in schools, tend to be long-term and intense. Later in life, many interactions tend to be more fleeting (a quick hello on the street or a brief conversation at a cocktail party), although interactions with family members tend to remain intense.

What does it mean to say that interaction is increasingly mediated? Give some examples that illustrate your answer.

Various sociological theories have been brought to bear on interaction. For example, as you learned earlier in this chapter, George Herbert Mead and later symbolic interactionists distinguished between a conversation of
gestures and interaction that relies on symbols such as language. Georg Simmel believed that human interaction not only gives rise to society but also meets a basic human need to be sociable. In the following discussion, you will see references to a variety of theories that deal with interaction.

**Superordinate–Subordinate Interactions**

Simmel saw society as being defined by interaction. Moreover, he differentiated between the forms interaction takes and the types of people who engage in interaction. For example, one “form” of interaction is the relationship between a superordinate and a subordinate (Simmel [1908] 1971a). This type of relationship is found in many settings, for example, between teacher and student in the classroom, between judge and defendant in the courtroom, and between guard and prisoner in the jail. We tend to think of this relationship as eliminating the subordinate’s independence. However, a relationship between the two cannot exist unless the subordinate has at least some freedom to be an active party to the interaction. The relationship between employee and supervisor is a good example. If the employee cannot react to the supervisor’s direction, there is no interaction—only one-way communication from the supervisor to the employee. Furthermore, experimental research has demonstrated that the greater the equality in an employee–manager relationship, the greater the amount of two-way communication. In such a situation, the subordinate feels less resentment, anger, and worry when conflict arises with the manager (Johnson, Ford, and Kaufman 2000).

**Reciprocity and Exchange**

To sociologists who theorize about exchange, interaction is a rational process in which those involved seek to maximize rewards and minimize costs. Interaction is likely to persist as long as those involved find it rewarding, and it is likely to wind down or end when one or more of the parties no longer find it rewarding. An important idea in this context is the social norm of *reciprocity*, which means that those engaged in interaction expect to give and receive rewards of roughly equal value (Gouldner 1960; Mazelis 2015; Moll 2010). When one party feels that the other is no longer adhering to this norm—that is, not giving as much as he or she is receiving—the relationship is likely to end.

Studies of exchange relationships, like much else in sociology, are now being challenged to find ways of dealing with new forms of virtual interaction: e-mail, social networking, and interaction on Skype and WhatsApp. One researcher who has explored the effects of virtual reality on interaction in the “real” world, and vice versa, concludes that “the constantly evolving avatar [or digital representation of oneself] influences the ‘real’ self, who now also orients toward virtual, yet all-too-real others” (Gottschalk 2010, 522). In other words, interactions in the digital realm and those in the physical realm both influence the self. Additional research questions come to mind readily. For example, are people compelled to cooperate to the same extent in the digital realm (such as when using e-mail communication) as they are in the material world (such as during in-person communication; Naquin, Kurtzberg, and Belkin 2008)? However, it is important to remember that the digital and material worlds are not separate from one another but, rather, interpenetrate. An important issue, then, is the connection between, for example, collaborative relationships online and offline (Ritzer 2013).

**“Doing” Interaction**

Another interactionist theory of great relevance here is ethnomethodology, which focuses on people’s everyday practices, especially those that involve interaction. The basic idea is that interaction is something that people actively “do,” something they accomplish daily. For example, the simple act of two people walking together can be considered a form of interaction. Engaging in certain practices makes it clear that you are walking with a particular someone and not with someone else (Pantzar and Shove 2010; Ryave and Schenkein 1974). You are likely to walk close to, or perhaps lean toward, a close friend. When you find yourself walking in step with a total stranger, you probably behave differently. You might separate yourself, lean away, and say “Excuse me,” to make it clear that you are not walking with that stranger and are not engaged in interaction with her. More complex forms of interaction require much more sophisticated practices. In the process of interacting, people create durable forms of interaction, such as those that relate to gender (West and Zimmerman 1987) and the family.

Ethnomethodology also spawned conversation analysis, which is concerned with how people do, or accomplish, conversations (Heritage and Stivers 2012). For example, you must know and use certain practices to carry on a successful conversation: You must know when it is your turn to talk and when it is appropriate to laugh at a comment made by someone else (Jefferson 1979). Conversation analysts have taken the lead in studying conversations, and interaction more generally, in great depth. They typically record conversations using audio or video devices so that they can study them in detail. Later, they transcribe the conversations to create written records of them.

**Interaction Order**

While every instance of interaction may seem isolated and independent of others, each is part of what Erving Goffman (2000) called the interaction order (Rawls 2015). This is a social domain that is organized and orderly. The order is created informally and governed by those involved in the interaction rather than by some formal structure, such as a bureaucracy and its constraints (Fine 2012). One example of an interaction order is a group of students who form a clique and develop their own norms to govern their interaction. In this thinking, Goffman was following Simmel’s view that society is based, in a real sense, on interaction. In many ways, society is interaction.

The interaction order can be seen in many settings and contexts. One example is the 2016 shooting of police officers...
in Dallas by a lone sniper, which killed five officers. Before the shooting, an orderly demonstration against police brutality was taking place, but the shooting destroyed this interaction order and replaced it with fear and confusion. Some sociologists have suggested that human interaction with animals is another area in which we can observe the interaction order (Jerolmack 2009, 2013). In fact, there is a relatively new sociological theory—actor-network theory—that seeks to include not only animals but also inanimate objects in the interaction order (Law and Hassard 1999).

**Status and Role**

Status and role are key elements in the interaction order, as well as in the larger structures in which such interactions often exist. A status is a position within a social system occupied by people. Within the university, for example, key statuses are professor and student. A role is what is generally expected of a person who occupies a given status. Thus, a professor is expected to show up for class, to be well prepared, to teach in an engaging manner, and so on. For their part, students are also expected to attend class, to listen and sometimes to participate, to avoid texting and checking their social media during class, to complete the required assignments, and to take and pass examinations.

The concept of status can be broken down further into ascribed and achieved status. An ascribed status is one that is not chosen; it is beyond the individual’s control. It involves a position into which the individual is placed or to which he or she moves, regardless of what that person does or the nature of his or her capacities or accomplishments. In some cases, individuals are born into an ascribed status—for example, the status associated with race, ethnicity, social class, sex, or gender. In contrast, an achieved status is a position a person acquires based on accomplishment or the nature of the individual’s capacities. It may be based on merit or earned, or the person may choose it—for example, by seeking out and finding someone who will be a mate for life. Spouse, parent, and career as a “successful” entrepreneur are all achieved statuses. In addition, adults can achieve improvement in their social class or socioeconomic status (children’s social class is almost always ascribed).

Whether ascribed or achieved, a status can become a master status, or a position that is (or becomes) more important than any other status, both for the person in the position and for all others involved. A master status will become central to a person’s identity, roles, behaviors, and interactions. Primary examples of master statuses are those associated with race, disability, gender, and even sexuality.

The social roles connected with any statuses can be congruent; that is, the expectations attached to a given status can be consistent. Student status (achieved) may have role expectations of attending class and doing homework outside of class. But roles can also come into conflict—for example, going to class and keeping up with your social life. Role conflict can be defined as conflicting expectations associated with a given position or multiple positions (Merton 1957; Schmidt et al. 2014). A professor who is expected to excel at both teaching and research can be seen as having role conflict. Devoting a lot of time to research can mean that a professor is ill prepared to teach her classes. Or a professor may be torn between the expectations of being a teacher (preparing for class) and those of being a parent (playing with her children). A student may need to deal with the role conflict between being a student and studying and being a friend who spends the evening helping a close acquaintance deal with a personal problem.

Much research has been done on the role conflicts experienced by workers with domestic obligations. Each role interferes with the individual’s ability to satisfactorily meet the expectations associated with the other role (Moore 1995). Research has supported this idea. For example, women who work outside the home, who still tend to be responsible for the care of children and the home, experience higher levels of stress and poorer physical health than do working men (Gove and Hughes 1979; Pearlin 1989; Roehling, Hernandez Jarvis, and Swope 2005). The heavy burden of the female caretaking role inhibits women’s ability to fulfill their role as caretakers of themselves.

Another role-related problem is role overload, in which people are confronted with more expectations than they can possibly handle (Mathews, Winkel, and Wayne 2014). Students during final exams week are often confronted with role overload in trying to satisfy the expectations of several professors and courses. One study of the American “time crunch” and mental health suggests that feeling under time pressure is likely the active ingredient in role overload, which in turn affects people’s psychological well-being (Roxburgh 2004).

There is a tendency to see roles as fixed, unchanging, and constraining. However, people do have the ability to engage in role making. That is, they have the ability to modify their roles, at least to some degree (Turner 1978). Thus, the professor in the previous example might take her child to the office so that she can perform parent and teacher roles simultaneously. Researchers have noted that parents adopt a variety of strategies to reduce work–family conflict (Kelly et al. 2014; Minnotte and Minnotte 2018). Examples of such strategies include reducing work hours, turning down promotions, and negotiating trade-offs with one’s partner.

**Interaction Concepts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONCEPT</th>
<th>EXPLANATION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td>Social engagement between two or more individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superordinate–subordinate interaction</td>
<td>A relationship in which the subordinate has at least some freedom to actively participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reciprocity</td>
<td>A social norm allowing those engaged in interaction to expect to give and receive rewards of roughly equal value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction order</td>
<td>A social domain whose order is created informally and governed by those engaged in the interaction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Micro-Level Social Structures

Through an accumulation of persistent patterns of interaction and social relationships, individuals contribute to the creation of social structures, which are enduring and regular social arrangements. Social structures include everything from the face-to-face interaction that is characteristic of the interaction order to networks, groups, organizations, societies, and the globe. This chapter focuses on micro-level social structures—interpersonal relationships, social networks, and groups. Chapter 6 covers larger-scale social structures.

Interpersonal Relationships

A good place to start a discussion of social structures is with another famous set of concepts created by Georg Simmel (1950) to describe the structures common to interpersonal relationships. A dyad is a two-person group, and a triad is a three-person group.

Dyads are the most basic of interpersonal relationships, but they often evolve into triads—as when a couple welcomes a new child. It would appear on the surface that the addition of one person to a dyad, creating a triad, would be of minimal importance sociologically. After all, how important can the addition of one person be? Simmel demonstrated that no further addition of members to a group, no matter how many that might be, is as important as the addition of a single person to a dyad. A good example is the dramatic change in the husband–wife relationship caused by the arrival of a first child. Another is the powerful impact of a new lover on an intimate dyadic relationship. In cases like these, social possibilities exist in the triad that do not exist in a dyad. For example, in a triad, two of the parties can form a coalition against the third: A wife and child can form a coalition against the husband. Or one member of the triad—say, the child—can take on the role of mediator or arbitrator in disputes involving the other members.

The most important point to be made about Simmel’s ideas on the triad is that it is the group structure that matters, not the people involved in the triad or the nature of their personalities. Different people with different personalities will make one triad different from another, but it is not the nature of the people or their personalities that make the triad itself possible.

Social Networks

Simmel’s work, especially on social forms, also informs the study of social networks (Erikson and Occhiuto 2017). The most basic social networks involve two or more individuals, but social networks also include groups, organizations, and societies; there can even be global social networks.

Network analysts are interested in how networks are organized and the implications of that organization for social life. They look at the nodes, or positions, occupied by individuals (and other entities) in a network, the linkages among nodes, and the importance of central nodes to other nodes in the network. Figure 5.1 shows a network with low centrality and one with high centrality. In the low-centrality network, one node appears in the center, but it is actually linked to only two other nodes. The central node in the high-centrality example is far more influential. Every other node is connected to it, and there is only one link that is independent of the central node. Those who occupy positions that are central in any network have access to a great many resources and therefore have a considerable ability to gain and to exercise power in a network.

A key idea in network theory is the “strength of weak ties.” We are all aware of the power of strong ties between, for example, family members, or among those who belong to close-knit social groups such as gangs. However, as Mark Granovetter (1974) has demonstrated, those who have only weak ties with others (that is, they are just acquaintances) can have great power. While those with strong ties tend to remain within given groups, those with weak ties can more easily move between groups and thus provide important linkages among and between group members (see Figure 5.2). Those with weak ties are the ones who hold together disparate groups that are themselves linked internally by strong ties.

Researchers generally find that at least half of all workers in the United States have obtained their jobs through informal means, meaning referrals, rather than formal job postings (Marsden and Gorman 2001; Pfeffer and Parra 2009). It makes sense, then, to understand the strength of weak ties. If you are looking for a job, you may want to seek out the help of friends and acquaintances who have weak ties to many groups. This is because they are likely to have many diverse and potentially useful contacts with...
people you and your strong ties do not know at a number of different employers.

Those responsible for hiring need to keep in mind that access to network resources largely depends on someone’s social position. Social network research has shown that socioeconomically disadvantaged individuals suffer an additional deficit in both strong and weak network ties (Granovetter 1974; Lin 1999; Lin, Ensel, and Vaughn 1981; Wegener 1991). Thus, they have an additional disadvantage in finding jobs. To overcome this barrier to finding talented workers, an employer may want to seek ties to networks that include the socioeconomically disadvantaged.

One point worth underscoring in any discussion of social networks is the importance of internet networks, including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (Gee, Jones, and Burke 2017). This is another domain where weak ties can be of great importance. On Facebook, for instance, you may have hundreds, even thousands, of “friends.” However, it is clear that many of these “friendships” involve weak ties—in fact, far weaker ties than analysts such as Granovetter had in mind. It is also important to note that they leave objective traces, such as e-mail messages and writings on Facebook walls. As a result, such networks are much easier to study than, for example, those that exist in face-to-face interaction, which usually leave few material traces. This is the reason the app Snapchat was developed; it forces you to arrange for traces—such as photos—to disappear within 1 to 10 seconds.

Groups

We have already encountered the key sociological concept of groups at several points in this chapter, especially in Simmel’s ideas on the dyad and beyond. A group is a relatively small number of people who over time develop a patterned relationship based on interaction with one another. However, just because we see a small number of people who appear to be together—say, in a queue waiting to board a plane—that does not mean they necessarily constitute a group. Most people in a queue are not likely to interact with one another, to have the time or inclination to develop patterned relationships with one another, or, if they do interact, to do so beyond the time it takes to board the plane and find their seats.

Types of Groups

Several key concepts in sociology relate to groups. Consider the traditional distinction between the primary group and the secondary group (Cooley 1909). Primary groups are small, are close-knit, and have intimate face-to-face interaction. Relationships in primary groups are personal, and people identify strongly with the groups. The family is the model of a primary group, although as we will see in Chapter 12, the family is often riddled with many conflicts, and at least some members leave the family or are driven from it. Primary groups can also take unlikely forms. A 2009 study of people in New York City who tend pigeons and fly them from the rooftops documents the formation of primary group ties among members involved in this rare animal practice activity (Jerolmack 2009). Such group ties can be stronger for these individuals than can class and ethnic ties.

In contrast, secondary groups are generally large and impersonal; ties are relatively weak, members do not know one another very well, and members’ impacts on one another are typically not very powerful. Members of a local parent–teacher association would be a good example of a secondary group.

Primary and secondary group ties can occur in the same social context. For example, the primary group for service-men and servicewomen is usually the squad or platoon. The secondary group is typically the company, battalion, brigade, or regiment (in descending order of closeness; Siebold 2007).

Also worth mentioning are reference groups, or groups you consider in evaluating yourself. Your reference group can be one to which you belong, or it can be another group to which you do not belong but nevertheless often relate (Merton and Kitt 1950). People often have many reference groups, and those groups can and do change over time. Knowing people’s reference groups, and how they...
change, tells us a great deal about their behavior, attitudes, and values. We often think of reference groups in positive terms. An example would be a group of people whose success you would like to emulate. They also can be negative if they represent values or ways of life that you reject (say, neo-Nazis). The reference group to which one belongs is not necessarily the most powerful group in one's life.

Reference groups can be illustrated by the case of immigrants. Newly arrived immigrants are more likely to take those belonging to the immigrant culture, or even those in the country from which they came, as their reference group. In contrast, their children, second-generation immigrants, are much more likely to take as their reference group those associated with the new culture in the country to which they have immigrated (Kosic et al. 2004).

One final set of concepts that can help us understand the sociological importance of groups is the distinction between in-groups and out-groups (Sumner [1906] 1940). An in-group is one to which people belong and with which they identify, perhaps strongly. An out-group is one to which outsiders, at least from the perspective of the in-group, belong. Thus, from your perspective, the group you sit with at your regular table in the college dining hall or fast-food court would be the in-group, while other groups at other tables might be the out-groups. The differences between these groups may be insignificant (e.g., whether they get their food in the food court from McDonald’s or Pizza Hut). However, they can also come to be so important (“jocks” versus “geeks”) that each group not only accepts its own ways but also rejects those of the others. In extreme cases this can lead to conflict between the in-group and the out-group. Research suggests that hostility often arises when members of the in-group perceive the out-group as constituting a threat to their self-interest (Rosenstein 2008). This is particularly evident in research on immigration (Schlueter and Scheepers 2010; Schneider 2008). In that case, native-born individuals (representing the in-group) may maintain discriminatory attitudes toward a growing population of foreign-born individuals (representing the out-group). In a more specific study it was found that religious fundamentalists in western Europe, especially Muslims, have very high levels of hostility toward out-groups.

More prosaically, in-groups and out-groups play a prominent role among fans of sport teams. Rivalries between NFL teams, like the Chicago Bears and the Green Bay Packers and the Cleveland Browns and the Pittsburgh Steelers, are renowned for creating in-group solidarity and out-group hostility among their fans.

Conformity to the Group

We have seen that group members generally conform to certain aspects of the group with which they prefer to identify. Some conformity is clearly necessary for a group to survive. If everyone “did his or her own thing,” or went his or her own way, there would be no group. But too much conformity can have disastrous consequences. A central issue in the sociological study of groups has been the degree to which members conform to the expectations and demands of the group, despite their own misgivings. The experiments by Stanley Milgram (1974) discussed in Chapter 3 demonstrated that people tended to conform to the demands of authority figures who ordered them to administer painful shocks. Groups often develop informal authority structures that can induce the kind of conformity uncovered by Milgram. Also discussed in Chapter 3 was research by Zimbardo (1973) that showed similarly troubling tendencies toward conformity.

Another series of experiments, conducted by Solomon Asch (1952), showed that groups with no clear authority figure also promote conformity. Asch demonstrated that the power of the group is so great that it may override an individual’s own judgments and perceptions. In one of the experiments, groups of seven to nine students were assembled. All but one (the subject) were confederates of the researcher. All but the subject knew the details of the experiment. Only the subject believed that the experiment was investigating vision. Each group was shown two cards, one with one vertical line on it and a second with three such lines (see Figure 5.3). One of the lines on the second card was the same length as the line on the first card. The other two lines were clearly different. All the students were asked to choose the line on the comparison card that

![FIGURE 5.3](image)

**Solomon Asch’s Conformity Experiment Cards**

Reference Card

Comparison Card

Source: Solomon Asch’s Conformity Experiment Cards is adapted from Solomon E. Asch, Opinions and Social Pressure. Scientific American, 193 (1955), pp. 31-35.
matched the single line on the reference card. As they had been instructed, each of the confederates chose, out loud, one of the wrong lines. The subjects were always positioned last in their groups. When the subjects’ turns came, about a third of them conformed to their groups’ erroneous choice and selected the same wrong line. They made the wrong choice, even though they apparently knew it was the wrong choice.

There is no question that some people conform to group demands at least some of the time. Conformity is especially likely when the demands come from someone in authority in the group. However, it is important to remember that about two-thirds of the choices made by subjects in the Asch conformity experiments indicated independence from the group. It is also important to note that these experiments are decades old, and many of them occurred in a period of American history more defined by conformity than the era we are in today.

This chapter has focused largely on such micro-level phenomena as individuals, interaction, and groups. In Chapter 6 we turn to the progressively more macro-level phenomena of organizations, societies, and the globe as a whole.

CHECKPOINT 5.5

Types of Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary group</td>
<td>A small, close-knit group with intimate face-to-face interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary group</td>
<td>A large and impersonal group with members who do not know each other very well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference group</td>
<td>A group you take into consideration in evaluating yourself, whether you belong to it or not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-group</td>
<td>A group to which people belong and with which they identify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-group</td>
<td>A group to which outsiders—from the perspective of the in-group—belong</td>
</tr>
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SUMMARY

The sociological perspective on the individual and the self focuses on the social interactions humans are capable of having with each other. Cooley’s concept of the looking-glass self, the idea that humans develop self-images reflecting the way in which others respond to them, is fundamental to sociology. Symbolic interactionism posits that humans use significant symbols, such as gestures and language, to develop a sense of self. George Herbert Mead defined the self as the ability to take oneself as an object. Once individuals are able to internalize the perspective of a group or community, they come to possess a sense of the generalized other. According to Mead the self is composed of two parts, the “I” that is impulsive and the “me” that is conformist.

Erving Goffman believed that in every interaction, or performance, individuals attempt to manage projections of themselves. On a front stage, they operate in an idealized manner, but on a back stage, they can more freely express themselves.

Socialization is the process through which a person learns and generally comes to accept the ways of a group or of a society as a whole. Primary socialization begins with newborns and infants and continues over the course of their childhood during anticipatory socialization. Socialization does not end with childhood—adults continue to be socialized throughout their lives. Our families, peers, workplaces, and the media are important agents of socialization.

Socialization involves interaction, or social engagement, between two or more individuals. Some interaction involves reciprocity, or the expectation that those involved in it will give and receive equally, while other interactions transpire between those with power and their subordinates. Interaction is deeply involved in people’s statuses and their related roles.

Patterns of interaction and social relationships that occur regularly and persist over time become social structures. A group is one type of social structure that develops when individuals interact over time and develop a patterned relationship. A small, close-knit group with intimate face-to-face interactions is a primary group. A secondary groups is larger and more impersonal; its members do not know each other very well.
In this context, the literature on feral children is used to illustrate the importance of interaction to human development. In what ways does this relate to the "nature versus nurture" debate?

2. According to Mead, what distinguishes humans from nonhumans?

3. How does the socialization process help individuals develop their sense of self? Why are games so important to the socialization process?

4. What is the difference between the "I" and the "me"? Why do people and society as a whole need both the "I" and the "me"?

5. According to Goffman, in what ways do we use impression management in our front stage performances? Why would a sociologist say that racism has increasingly been relegated to the back stage? What is problematic about this development?

6. Why are families important agents of socialization? How do families from higher social classes socialize their children differently than families from lower social classes do? What effects might these differences in socialization have on children?

7. How are we socialized to be consumers? In what ways has the internet resocialized us as consumers?

8. In what ways is being a fifth grader in the United States both an ascribed and an achieved status? What does this suggest about the differences between roles attached to ascribed statuses versus those attached to achieved statuses?

9. In the realm of social networks, why are "weak ties" helpful to those looking for jobs? What effect has the internet had on the development of weak ties and strong ties?

10. In what ways do we use images in the mass media as reference groups? How do the mass media help to define in-groups and out-groups?