

Socialization

The process of socialization is learnt rather than inherited and involves members of society acquiring the culture of the society in which they grow up in. This lifelong process starts from the time a child is born and continues throughout their entire life. It enables individuals to play a normal role in society by teaching and shaping human behaviour in accordance with the values and norms that are accepted in their community.

The primary agencies, and possibly the most important, of socialization are usually the parents and family. They have an intense influence on their children, providing them with the basic cultural skills necessary for future development and progress within society. During early years babies are helpless and cannot survive unaided and it is necessary for parents to teach them the language, appropriate behaviour patterns, and accepted traditions in the culture in which they are born. Infants copy the examples set by their parents and respond to signs of approval or disapproval, such as an approving smile or a disapproving cross voice. This enables children's behaviour to be manipulated so that it conforms to the standards expected of them by their parents and society. Gradually children become self-aware and knowledgeable and take an active role in the socialization process, they are able to act upon what they have learnt, which allows them to increase their social interaction in other areas. Further socialization is provided by peer groups and the community as the individual begins to learn their social role in terms of gender, age, social position, and how rules and regulations are used to control and restrict unacceptable behaviour.

As children mature they play a more active role in society by attending school, joining special interest clubs such as sports or music, and eventually going to work. These secondary agencies then begin to educate and influence their development and become additional socializing forces. Conformity is achieved because as human beings we all want to be accepted, approved of and receive affection and status. Adult socialization is concerned with the life-long process of learning and development. Any one who enters an institution, such as a prison, boarding school, or the services will experience re-socialization as they adjust to the norms and values within that institution.

For anyone entering a 'total institution', such as a mental hospital, prison, or monastery, their existence is completely isolated from the outside world and they are socialized into a rigorously enforced regulated system. Erving Goffman carried out studies in these institutions to determine the 'changes which occurred in an individual's sense of self under such conditions'. He found that on entering one of these institutions the

individual's personal possessions were removed, clothes changed for regulation uniforms, a standard hair cut, and an identity name or number was given. All of these things stripped them of their 'sense of self' and 'individuality', and with systematic humiliation before their peers and superiors feelings of self-worth were easily broken. However during their time in institutions most people found 'pragmatic ways to adjust to it' enabling them to retain their 'sense of self' and protecting themselves psychologically. Only in extreme long-term cases did individuals become so institutionalised that it was impossible for them to be released back into society. Overall pre-existing cultural norms and values could not be removed and therefore confirms that although we are willing to conform when necessary we are not prepared to sacrifice our identities.

Norms are unwritten rules and regulations that direct our actions. They are the guidelines within our society that make us behave in acceptable and appropriate ways. They are enforced by positive and negative sanctions, an approving or disapproving glance; the threat of formal sanctions will usually be enough to enforce normal behaviour. An example of this would be, a man wearing a dress in public would receive many disapproving glances from those around him, but if he were to appear in public naked he would receive a formal sanction by the police. Norms will define acceptable behaviour for specific occupations, circumstances, and situations within society.

Values provide a more personal approach to setting acceptable behaviour patterns; it is the individuals belief that something is good or bad that will form the basis of their actions and thoughts. There can be many contrasting values from within a society, such as different religious beliefs, but in a multi-cultural society this is acceptable and does not affect the harmony of the larger group as a whole.

Socialization is the same for both men and women, however the expected behaviour patterns are not. Gender roles vary in different cultures and it is parents and society that teach this. Parents will manipulate children's behaviour to conform to the accepted normal behaviour for a girl or a boy. They will also direct their children towards games and toys considered appropriate for their gender, dolls for girls and guns for boys. Many parents would find it very disturbing if their son were to ask for a doll, this is called canalisation. Parents and adults will also use language appropriate to gender. For example at a recent football match, with my daughters, the man sitting next to my daughter suggested that she placed her hands over her ears when the crowd sang some of the songs, he considered they were not appropriate for her to hear. Gender also affects the activities that are considered appropriate, for girls', netball, dance, and gymnastics and for boys' football, rugby, and cricket. However as sexual discrimination has become a major influence

in our culture many of these boundaries are slowly being eroded. In other cultures gender roles vary considerably but through gendered socialization expectations and identities can be clearly defined.

There are many norms and values within a society that will differ from one family to the next. If a child is brought up by a single parent it will become an accepted way of life for that child as opposed to a child brought up by two parents in a long term relationship who will see that as an accepted way of life. It is also worth bearing in mind that acceptable behaviour and traditions in one culture may not be acceptable in another. For example in western society we place a high value on human life and so many of our norms and values are for the protection and respect we have for life, like safety regulations in the work place. In other cultures, however, it is acceptable to murder, in the Inuit society they kill baby girls and expel the old from the tribe knowing that they are certain to die. This ensures that the population is controlled and the culture survives.

As an individual develops, both internal and external influences will help to shape their identity and personality. Culture undoubtedly affects almost every aspect of life, family, food, literature, music, religion, laws, and media, to name but a few. Within society individuals understand what is expected of them and by conforming will receive recognition by being an active member of that society. If we were to move to a completely different country the culture would be different and it would be necessary for us to adjust to the accepted norms and values of that culture.

The process of socialization enables cultures to continue and societies to live together in a stable and relatively ordered state. Deviance will always exist to a certain degree, as individuals interpret norms and values their own way, in an ever changing society and environment. Crime will also exist because there will always be individuals that think themselves above the laws of their community and this will be punished by formal sanctions. The majority of people will live their lives accepting the norms, values, and laws of their culture that socialization has taught them.

Socialization is necessary to maintain social order discuss.

Socialization provides the boundaries for accepted social behaviour and the shared norms and values from within that culture enable life as it is to be possible. It is possible for many norms and values to differ in sub-cultures, within a culture, but as long as the core-values remain consistent, society should remain stable. In effect socialization is a consensus between members of society about what constitutes appropriate behaviour and without it there would be disruption and disorder.

Survival is man's most primitive instinct and many cultures revolve around this theory, doing whatever is necessary to survive. According to Hobbes passion is the most primary instinct and if it is allowed 'a free rein' the result would be 'war of all against all'. Self-preservation is present in all humans but the protection that can be given, to the individual against aggression, by a social group will persuade a person to enter into that group. His view is that humans enter into ordered society because they fear the consequences if they do not.

Durkheim studied how the need for social order was fulfilled. He believed that humans have a 'homo duplex' nature, meaning that humans have two sides to their nature. One side being egotistical and selfish and the other a belief in moral values. It is this second side that society must manipulate if social order is to be maintained. By general consensus on moral issues individuals can form an integrated social group. If the selfish side was dominant then conflict would result. As Durkheim said 'For where interest is the only ruling force each individual finds himself in a state of war with every other'. He thought that individuals accepted social order because they believed them to be right.

Functionalists believe that the social structure is made up of 'interrelated parts' and society has basic requirements that are necessary for its survival, these are known as 'functional prerequisites'. Accepted values, integration, and the maintenance of order, through punishment, are all essential to maintain order and stability. It is the socialization process that makes this possible.

There are many conflicting views on how social order is maintained but socialization is necessary if society is to co-operate peacefully. Social behaviour is determined by what we are taught. The transmission of values from one generation to the next by the family, is a fundamental and stabilizing part of the social structure. If individuals were encouraged to follow selfish and egotistical pursuits it would cause irreparable damage both to individuals and the social structure. Clearly socialization must teach the individual acceptable behaviour, values and norms if society is to remain harmonious.

