

## Module 4 Socialization and Social Control

### Lecture 19

#### Socialization: Part I

**Socialization** generally refers to the process in which people learn the skills, knowledge, values, motives, and roles (i.e., culture) of the groups to which they belong or the communities in which they live. It should be pointed out from the beginning of this chapter that socialization includes two components (Long and Hadden 1985). The first component of socialization is the process, mentioned above, that leads to the adoption of culture. The second component is the outcome of the process, for example, "Was the socialization successful?" or "He has been socialized to believe God exists." Socialization is seen as society's principal mechanism for influencing the development of character and behavior. Most sociologists treat socialization "as a cornerstone both for the maintenance of society and for the well-being of the individual" (Long and Hadden 1985).

#### Elements of Socialization

As socialization is a fundamental sociological concept, there are a number of components to this concept that are important to understand. While not every sociologist will agree which elements are the most important, or even how to define some of the elements of socialization, the elements outlined below should help clarify what is meant by socialization.

#### Goals of Socialization

Arnett (1995), in presenting a new theoretical understanding of socialization (see below), outlined what he believes to be the three goals of socialization:

- (a) Impulse control and the development of a conscience;
- (b) Role preparation and performance, including occupational roles, gender roles, and roles in institutions such as marriage and parenthood;
- (c) The cultivation of sources of meaning, or what is important, valued, and to be lived for.

In short, socialization is the process that prepares humans to function in social life. It should be reiterated here that socialization is culturally relative – people in different cultures are socialized differently. This distinction does not and should not inherently force an evaluative judgment. Socialization, because it is the adoption of culture, is going to be different in every culture. Socialization, as both process and an outcome, is not better or worse in any particular culture.

#### Primary and Secondary Socialization

Socialization is a life process, but is generally divided into two parts. *Primary socialization* takes place early in life, as a child and adolescent. *Secondary socialization* refers to the socialization that takes place throughout one's life, both as a child and as one encounters new groups that require additional socialization. While there are scholars who argue that only one or the other of these occurs, most social scientists tend to combine the two, arguing that the basic or core identity of the individual develops during primary socialization, with more

specific changes occurring later – secondary socialization – in response to the acquisition of new group memberships and roles and differently structured social situations. The need for later life socialization may stem from the increasing complexity of society with its corresponding increase in varied roles and responsibilities (Mortimer and Simmons 1978).

Mortimer and Simmons (1978) outline three specific ways these two parts of socialization differ:

**Content:** Socialization in childhood is thought to be concerned with the regulation of biological drives. In adolescence, socialization is concerned with the development of overarching values and the self-image. In adulthood, socialization involves more overt and specific norms and behaviour, such as those related to the work role as well as more superficial personality features.

**Context:** In earlier periods, the *socializee* (the person being socialized) more clearly assumes the status of *learner* within the context of the family of orientation, the school, or the peer group. Also, relationships in the earlier period are more likely to be affectively charged, i.e., highly emotional. In adulthood, though the socializee takes the role of student at times, much socialization occurs after the socializee has assumed full incumbency of the adult role. There is also a greater likelihood of more formal relationships due to situational contexts (e.g., work environment), which moderates down the affective component.

**Response:** The child and adolescent may be more easily malleable than the adult. Also, much adult socialization is self-initiated and voluntary; adults can leave or terminate the process at any time.

Socialization is, of course, a social process. As such, it involves interactions between people. Socialization, as noted in the distinction between primary and secondary, can take place in multiple contexts and as a result of contact with numerous groups. Some of the more significant contributors to the socialization process are: parents, friends, schools, siblings, and co-workers. Each of these groups includes a culture that must be learned and to some degree appropriated by the socializee in order to gain admittance to the group.

### **Total Institutions**

Not all socialization is voluntary nor is all socialization successful. There are components of society designed specifically to resocialize individuals who were not successfully socialized to begin with. For instance, prisons and mental health institutions are designed to resocialize the people who are deemed to have not been successfully socialized. Depending on the degree of isolation and resocialization that takes place in a given institution, some of these institutions are labeled *total institutions*.

In his classic study of total institutions, **Erving Goffman** (1961: 6) provides the following characteristics of total institutions:

- All aspects of life are conducted in the same place under the same authority.
- The individual is a member of a large cohort, all treated alike.
- All daily activities (over a 24-hour period) are tightly scheduled.
- There is a sharp split between supervisors and lower participants.
- Information about the member's fate is withheld.

The most common examples of total institutions include mental hospitals, prisons, and military boot camps, though there are numerous other institutions that could be considered total institutions as well. The goal of total institutions is to facilitate a complete break with one's old life in order for the institution to resocialize the individual into a new life.

Mortimer and Simmons (1978) note a difference in socialization methodologies in different types of institutions. When the goal of an institution is socialization (primary or secondary), the institution tends to use normative pressures. When the goal of an institution is resocialization of deviants, coercion is frequently involved

### **Broad and Narrow Socialization**

An interesting though seldom used distinction in types of socialization was proposed by Arnett (1995). Arnett distinguishes between broad and narrow socialization:

- **Broad socialization** is intended to promote independence, individualism, and self-expression; it is dubbed *broad* because this type of socialization has the potential of resulting in a broad range of outcomes.
- **Narrow socialization** is intended to promote obedience and conformity; it is dubbed *narrow* because there is a narrow range of outcomes.

These distinctions correspond to Arnett's definition of socialization, which is:

- The whole process by which an individual born with behavioural potentialities of enormously wide range is led to develop actual behaviour which is confined with a much narrower range;
- The range of what is customary and acceptable for him according to the standards of his group.
- Arnett explains that his understanding of socialization should not be understood as having just two options, broad or narrow. Instead, the author argues that socialization can be broad or narrow within each of the seven socializing forces he outlines (e.g., family, friends, etc.). Because each force can be either broad or narrow, there is a wide variety of possible broad/narrow socialization combinations. Finally, Arnett notes two examples where his distinction is relevant. First, Arnett argues that there are often differences in socialization by gender. Where these differences exist, argues Arnett, socialization tends to be narrower for women than for men. Arnett also argues that Japanese socialization is narrow as there is more pressure toward conformity in that culture.

### **The Importance of Socialization**

One of the most common methods used to illustrate the importance of socialization is to draw upon the few unfortunate cases of children who were, through neglect, misfortune, or wilful abuse, not socialized by adults while they were growing up.

## Theoretical Understandings of Socialization

Socialization, as a concept in social scientific research, has evolved over time. While the basic idea outlined above has been a component of most understandings of socialization, there has been quite a variety of definitions and theories of socialization. Some of these approaches are presented here as definitional variety is often informative (see Holland 1970, Mortimer and Simmons 1978, and Long and Hadden 1985 for more information).

- **Symbolic interactionism:** the self develops as a result of social interactions; as a result, socialization is highly dependent on the situations in which the actor finds him/herself; this approach also argues that socialization is a continuous, lifelong process.
- **Role theory:** socialization is seen as a process of acquisition of appropriate norms, attitudes, self-images, values, and role behaviors that enable acceptance in the group and effective performance of new roles; in this framework, socialization is seen as a conservative force, permitting the perpetuation of the social organization in spite of the turn-over of individual members through time.
- **Reinforcement theory:** the self develops as a result of cognitive evaluations of costs and benefits; this understanding assumes that the socializee, in approaching new roles, is an independent and active negotiator for advantages in relationships with role partners and membership groups.
- **Internalization theory:** socialization is a series of stages in which the individual learns to participate in various levels of organization of society; this theory contends that the child internalizes a cognitive frame of reference for interpersonal relations and a common system of expressive symbolism in addition to a moral conscience; this approach was advocated by Talcott Parsons.

### Socialization as *Joining Groups*

The concept of socialization has traditionally addressed the problem of individual adjustment to society. In all of the approaches outlined above, socialization has, in one way or another, referred to the idea that society shapes its members toward compliance and cooperation with societal requirements. In order to reduce confusion, develop a research methodology for measuring socialization, and potentially lead to the comparability of research findings from different studies, Long and Hadden (1985) proposed a revised understanding of socialization.

Rather than referring to a vague adoption or learning of culture, Long and Hadden reframed socialization as "the medium for transforming newcomers into bona fide members of a group." Before discussing some of the specifics of this approach, it may be useful to outline some of the critiques Long and Hadden present of earlier approaches to socialization.

According to Long and Hadden, many earlier approaches to socialization extended socialization to every part of human social life. As a result, everyone becomes both a socializing agent (socializer) and a novice (socializee) in all encounters with others. This conceptualization leaves socialization without a social home; it is all around but no place in particular. Another criticism of previous approaches is that they allowed socialization to include anything, and anything which is part of the process at one time may be excluded at

another. With this conceptualization, any phenomenon may shift its status in the socialization process without changing its own composition or expression. In other words, socialization includes virtually everything, excludes almost nothing, and shifts with circumstance and outcomes. Additionally, previous approaches to socialization lacked specificity about the nature of socialization activity. Defining socialization by its outcomes made it unnecessary to stipulate the nature of the process conceptually. Socialization could be attributed to *this or that* but in order to truly understand what is taking place it is necessary to go beyond just pointing to socializing agents and specify what it is about those agents that is doing the socializing.

Another serious drawback of earlier approaches is that they disregard the *process* component of socialization. Doing so limits the socialization concept to employment primarily as a post hoc interpretive category that is used to lend significance to findings defined and developed in other terms.

As a result of these criticisms, Long and Hadden (1985) found themselves presented with a two-fold task:

- (i) Locate socialization and its social boundaries more precisely
- (ii) Specify the distinctive properties which distinguish it from related phenomena

To accomplish this, Long and Hadden developed a new understanding of socialization, “socialization is the process of creating and incorporating new members of a group from a pool of newcomers, carried out by members and their allies”. Under this understanding, the principal agents of socialization are certified and practicing members of the group to which novices are being socialized. It should be noted that *certified* here is only a shortened way of saying “a socially approved member of the group”. Thus, Long and Hadden's revised understanding of socialization sees it as both the process and outcome of joining groups.

### **Research Examples**

Numerous examples of research on socialization could be presented in this section. One important area of socialization research involves differences in gender socialization, but much of that research is summarized in the chapter on gender. The following three research examples are interesting in that they explore both primary and secondary socialization and do so from varying perspectives.

### **Socialization and Social Class**

Ellis, Lee, and Peterson (1978), developing a research agenda begun by Melvin L. Kohn (1959), explored differences in how parents raise their children relative to their social class.

Kohn (1959) found that lower class parents were more likely to emphasize conformity in their children whereas middle-class parents were more likely to emphasize creativity and self-reliance.

Ellis et al. proposed and found that parents value conformity over self-reliance in children to the extent that conformity superseded self-reliance as a criterion for success in their own endeavours. In other words, Ellis et. al. verified that the reason lower-class parents emphasize

conformity in their children is because they experience conformity in their day-to-day activities. For example, factory work is far more about conforming than innovation.

Another study in this same area explored a slightly different component of this relationship. Erlanger (1974) was interested in a correlation between social class and physical violence. While he did not find a strong correlation indicating lower class individuals were more likely to employ physical violence in punishing their children, he did present evidence concerning several outdated propositions. Erlanger's findings include:

- Physical punishment *does not* lead to *working class authoritarianism*;
- Childhood punishment experiences *do not* explain the greater probability that working class;
- Adults, as opposed to middle class adults, will commit homicide;
- General use of corporal punishment *is not* a precursor to child abuse;
- Use of corporal punishment *is not* part of a subcultural positive evaluation of violence.

### **Socialization and Death Preparation**

Marshall (1975) interviewed a number of retirement home residents to explore how their environment influenced their thinking about death. In essence, Marshall was examining secondary socialization concerning mortality. Marshall found that a combination of relationships, behavioural changes, and retirement home culture contributed to a conception of death that was both accepting and courageous.

Residents of this particular retirement home found themselves with more time on their hands – to think about death – because they no longer had to care for their own homes. Additionally, they found themselves surrounded by people in a situation similar to their own: they were basically moving into the retirement home to prepare for death. The prevalence of elderly people facilitated discussions of death, which also helped socialize the residents into their acceptance of mortality. Finally, the retirement home community encouraged a culture of life and fulfilment in part to counter-act the frequency of death. Some residents calculated there was one death per week in the retirement home. In light of such numbers, it was important to the success of the community to maintain a positive culture that embraced life yet accepted death. In summary, Marshall found that numerous factors contributed to the socialization of residents into a positive lifestyle that was also accepting of and preparatory for their impending deaths.

### **Do College Preparation Classes Make a Difference?**

Rosenbaum (1975) was interested in the effects of high school tracks on IQ. High school tracks are the different levels or types of courses students can take; for instance, many high schools now include college preparation tracks and general education tracks. Rosenbaum's theory was that students who followed the lower tracks (non-college preparation) would score lower on IQ tests over time than would students who followed the higher tracks (college-preparation).

Considering that school is one of the primary contributors to socialization, it makes sense that participation in a given track can also result in the adoption of the norms, values, beliefs, skills, and behaviour that correspond to that track. In other words, tracks can turn into a type

of self-fulfilling prophecy: you may start out at the same level as someone in a higher track, but by the time you have completed the lower track you will have become like the other students in your track.

To reduce confounding variables and ensure notable test effects, Rosenbaum selected a homogeneous, white, working class public school with five different, highly stratified classes. Rosenbaum then compared IQ scores for individuals in the different tracks at two time points. As it turns out, *tracking* does have a significant effect on IQ. People in lower tracks can actually see a decline in IQ compared to a possible increase among those in the upper track. In other words, tracks socialize their students into their corresponding roles.

## References

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## Questions

1. What is socialization?
2. What do you mean by primary and secondary socialization?
3. Give Mortimer and Simmon's view on the differences between primary and secondary socialization.
4. What is meant by total institutions?
5. Elucidate the various theoretical understanding of socialization.
6. What are joining groups?
7. Explain the relation between socialization and class.