CHAPTER 2

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SOCIALIZATION AND SOCIAL INTERACTION

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CHAPTER OUTLINE

- The Individual and Society
  - *Reading: "Review of Albert Schaeffle's 'Bau und Leben des Sozialen Körpers: Erster Band,'" by Émile Durkheim*
- Socialization
  - *Using Your Sociological Imagination: How Do Toys Socialize Us?*
  - *Methods in Depth: The Socialization of Women in the Hate Movement*
- Aging and Socialization
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- Summary
- Key Terms
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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

2.1 Explain how Durkheim sees the connection between individuals and society.

2.2 Define socialization and illustrate how the different theoretical approaches explain this process.

2.3 Explain socialization as a life-long process and give examples of how we are socialized over the course of our lives.

2.4 Explain Goffman's dramaturgical model and outline how this model helps us to understand social interaction.

One of the core concerns of sociology is to understand how individuals are shaped by society. We are socialized over the course of our lives to fit in to society and to follow its rules. This socialization starts early with our parents telling us to share with our siblings or to say "please" and "thank you." It continues as we learn in school how to make friends and be a good student. And it will last throughout our whole lives as we move into new relationships, family roles, occupations, and groups. The process of learning to fit in to society is life-long. However, we also sometimes challenge society and its rules. For example, we may dress in an unconventional way, make career or family decisions that are different from what our parents might hope, or join a group that challenges laws or rules with which we do not agree. How can we understand the complex relationship between individuals and society? These connections are the core of this chapter and of sociology itself.

THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY

Émile Durkheim, whose study of suicide was discussed in Chapter 1, said that society soars above us, exerts a constraining influence on us, and regulates collective activity. At the same time, society enables us to understand the rules that govern social behavior and helps us get along with one another. This chapter examines how we become a member of society through socialization, an important process that both facilitates our existence in society and constrains our actions. We will discuss how we, as individuals, learn to fit into society through socialization, why this process is important, and how it continues throughout our lives.

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Émile Durkheim is often considered one of the founding figures of sociology. Here he sits, perhaps pondering society.

Durkheim's first published article, excerpted in the following pages, was a review of the German sociologist Albert Schaeffle's *Bau und Leben des Sozialen Körpers: Erster Band* (which roughly translates as the construction and life of the social body). Written when Durkheim was 27 years old, the article lays the foundation for his influential theory of society, which he continued to develop over the course of his career. The review begins with a discussion of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's ideas of human nature. A well-known philosopher and political theorist, Rousseau (1712–1778) began his theories of human nature by thinking about what humans would be like before society existed. Rousseau (2011) thought that humans could exist before there were societies and that they would be happy savages who did not have language or interact with one another. He asserted that the stage before society existed, between the primitive idea of humans as brute animals and the modern extreme of decadent civilization, was the best stage in human development. He imagined that

> nothing is so gentle as man in his primitive state, when placed by nature at an equal distance from the stupidity of brutes and the fatal enlightenment of civil man. (Rousseau, 2011, 64) . . . The more one reflects on it, the more one finds that this state was the least subject to upheavals and the best for man, and that he must have left it only by virtue of some fatal chance happening that, for the common good, ought never to have happened. The example of savages, almost all of whom have been found in this state, seems to confirm that the human race had been made to remain in it always; that this state is the veritable youth of the world; and that all the subsequent progress has been in appearance so many steps toward the perfection of the individual, and in fact toward the decay of the species. (Rousseau, 2011, 74)

For Rousseau, society corrupts humans and leads to our decay.

Durkheim fundamentally disagreed with these ideas for several reasons. First, he thought that humans could not exist without society or develop without interaction with other humans. In addition, he argued that society is good for people because it helps them feel connected to one another. In fact, Durkheim's definition of what it means to be human is fundamentally social; he posited that part of what makes us human is our interactions with and dependence on one another. While Rousseau might have been able to imagine a world of humans before society, Durkheim claimed that it is impossible to have humans without society because society is what *makes* us human.

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READING: "REVIEW OF ALBERT SCHAEFFLE'S *BAU UND LEBEN DES SOZIALEN KÖRPERS: ERSTER BAND*"

By Émile Durkheim

The following review written by Émile Durkheim outlines the basis for his theories about the connections between the individual and society. In this article Durkheim highlights his main assertion that individuals are fundamentally shaped by society. When reading this article, consider how it challenges the dominant view in society that individuals are the masters of their own fate. How are our individual decisions and actions shaped by larger society?

I

Society is not a simple collection of individuals, it is an entity which preceded those who comprise it at present and which will survive them, which acts more on them than they on it, which has its own life, own consciousness, own interests and destiny. But what is its nature? . . .

We are not dealing with man as Rousseau conceived of him—that abstract being, born to solitude, renouncing it only very late and by a sort of voluntary sacrifice, and then only as the issue of a well-deliberated covenant. Every man is, on the contrary, born for society and in a society. What proves this is not only his marvelous aptitude for defining himself within it and, consequently, for uniting himself with it; still more, it is his inability to live in isolation. What remains if, from the sum of our knowledge, our sentiments, and our customs we take away all that comes to us from our ancestors, our masters, and the milieu in which we live? We will have removed at the same time all that makes us truly men. But aside from all that thus reaches us from outside, there is within us, or so it appears, something intimate and personal which is our own creation; this is our ideal. This is, in the final analysis, a world in which the individual reigns supreme and into which society does not penetrate. Doesn't the cult of the ideal presuppose an entirely internal life, a spirit turned inward on itself and detached from other things? Is idealism not at once the most elevated and the most prideful form of egoism? Quite the contrary, there is no more powerful link for uniting men to one another. For the ideal is impersonal; it is the common possession of all mankind. It is toward this dimly glimpsed goal that all the forces of our nature converge. The more we are clearly aware of it, the more we feel that we are in solidarity with each other. This is precisely what distinguishes human society from all others; it alone can be moved by this need for a universal ideal. . . .

IV

There exists a social consciousness of which individual consciousness are, at least in part, only an emanation. How many ideas or sentiments are there which we obtain completely on our own? Very few. Each of us speaks a language which he has not himself created: we find it ready-made. Language is, no doubt, like the clothing in which thought is dressed up. It is not, however, everyday clothing, not flattering to everyone's figure, and not the sort that anyone can wear to advantage. It can adapt itself only to certain

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minds. Every articulated language presupposes and represents a certain articulation of thought. By the very fact that a given people speaks in its own way, it thinks in its own way. We take in and learn at the same time. Similarly, where do we get both the rules of reasoning and the methods of applied logic? We have borrowed all these riches from the common capital. Finally, are not our resolutions, the judgments which we make about men and about things, ceaselessly determined by public mores and tastes? That is how it happens that each people has its own physiognomy, temperament, and character. That is how it happens that at certain moments a sort of moral epidemic spreads through the society, one which, in an instant, warps and perverts everyone's will. All these phenomena would be inexplicable if individual consciousness were such independent monads.

But how are we to conceive of this social consciousness? Is it a simple and transcendent being, soaring above society? The metaphysician is free to imagine such an indivisible essence deep within all things! It is certain that experience shows us nothing of the sort. The collective mind (*l'esprit collectif*) is only a composite of individual minds. But the latter are not mechanically juxtaposed and closed off from one another. They are in perpetual interaction through the exchange of symbols; they interpenetrate one another. They group themselves according to their natural affinities; they coordinate and systematize themselves. In this way is formed an entirely new psychological being, one without equal in the world. The consciousness with which it is endowed is infinitely more intense and more vast than those which resonate within it. For it is "a consciousness of consciousness" (*une conscience de consciences*). . . .

We can, therefore, affirm that a collective consciousness is nothing but an integrated system, a harmonic consensus. And the law of this organization is the following: each social mass gravitates about a central point and is subject to the action of a directing force which regulates and combines the elementary movements. Schaeffle calls this force authority. The various authorities are subordinated one to another in their turn, and that is how a new life, at once unified and complex, arises out of all the individual activities.

Authority can be represented by a man or by a class or by a slogan. But whatever form it takes, it is indispensable. What would become of individual life without innervation? We would have chaos. Always and everywhere it is faith that provides the force of authority. If we obey when authority commands, it is because we believe in it. Faith can be freely given or imposed; with progress, it will no doubt become more intelligent and more enlightened, but it will never disappear. If, by the use of violence or trickery, it is suffocated for a time, either the society breaks apart or new beliefs are reborn without delay—beliefs less correct and worse than those which preceded them because they are less ripe and not so well tested, because, pressed by the necessity of living, we seize upon the first beliefs to happen along, without examining them. What's more, faith is nothing to be embarrassed about. We cannot know everything or do everything for ourselves; this is an axiom which every day becomes more true. It is, therefore, quite necessary that we address ourselves to

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someone else, someone more competent. Why stake our honour on being self-sufficient? Why not take advantage of the division of labour?

Authority is, nonetheless, a terrible thing if it is tyrannical. Everyone must be able to criticize it and need submit to it only voluntarily. If the masses are reduced to passive obedience, they will ultimately resign themselves to this humiliating role; they will become, little by little, a sort of inert matter which will no longer resist events, which can be moulded at will, but from which it will no longer be possible to wrest the slightest spark of life. Yet the basis of a people's force is the initiative of the citizens; it is the activity of the masses. Authority directs social life but neither creates it nor replaces it. It coordinates its movements, but presupposes their existence. . . .

A broad-minded individual can, almost at the same time, think one thing and its opposite; but he cannot at once act and abstain from acting. One must choose between two courses of action. It is, therefore, necessary that someone in the society be charged with choosing and deciding. Some authority is no doubt also necessary to coordinate individual intellects and sensitivities. But this authority has no precise organization; it is established here or there according to needs and circumstances. It is, moreover, only consultative. On the other hand, that authority which is charged with guarding the interests of the country is made to command and must be obeyed. That is why it is concentrated at certain determinate points of the territory and belongs only to certain clearly designated persons. In the same way, the principles which regulate collective activity are not indecisive generalizations or vague approximations but positive laws, the formulation of which is sharply delineated once and for all.

However, the role of the public is not purely passive submission: it participates in this activity even though it does not direct it. The laws do not owe their existence to the solitary will of the legislator. They are immanent in society just as the laws of gravity are immanent in physical bodies. The state does not create the former any more than the scientist creates the latter. Law and morality are simply the conditions of collective life; it is, therefore, the people who make them, so to speak, and the people who determine them just by living. The legislator states and formulates them. Moreover, he is not indispensable. If he does not intervene, the law nonetheless exists in the form of custom—half unconscious, it is true, but no less efficacious for that. It loses its precision, not its authority. Moreover, most collective resolutions are directly prepared and almost imposed by public opinion. Once a question becomes the order of the day, opposing sides are organized, engage in battle, and fight for the majority. To be sure, in well-constituted societies, this entire movement, once it arrives on the threshold of social consciousness, stops there. At that point, the organ of the will begins to function. But who cannot see that the matter has already been decided, just as the human will has already been predetermined, by the time that deliberation is cut off? It is the stronger side which triumphs.

But if we concede so large a role to individual wills, will they not impart to the social body all sorts of disordered movements? This fear would be legitimate if egoism was man's only natural sentiment. If everyone

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pursued only his personal ends, the society would be done for; torn in all directions, it would soon break apart. But at the same time that we love ourselves, we love others. We have a certain sense of solidarity (*Gemeinsinn*) which prevents us from ignoring others and which predisposes us without difficulty to devotion and sacrifice. Of course, if we believe that society is an invention of men, an artificial combination, then there is reason to fear that it will perpetually be torn apart. For so fragile a bond can be broken at any moment.

Man is free, Rousseau said, and yet everywhere he is in chains. If this is true, there is reason to fear that at any moment he will break his chains. But this savage individualism is not part of nature. The real man—the man who is truly a man—is an integral part of a society which he loves just as he loves himself, because he cannot withdraw from it without becoming decadent.

V

Social psychology can ultimately be reduced to the special study of the nervous system: it is a chapter of histology. Schaeffle passes from the tissues to the organs.

Every organ is formed by the combination of five functional tissues. . . . These five elements are combined in different ways and in different proportions, but they are all necessary and are found everywhere. The Church, whose ends are not of this world, still has its economic organization; the shop and the factory have their intellectual lives. . . .

Social life does not take place in the penumbra of the unconscious; everything happens in broad daylight. The individual is not led by instinct; rather, he has a clear conception of the group to which he belongs and the ends which it is appropriate to pursue. He compares, discusses, and yields only to reason. Faith itself is but the free submission of an intellect which comprehends the advantages and the necessity of the division of labour. That is why there is something free and willed about the social organization. Societies are not, to be sure, the product of a contract, and they cannot be transformed from one day to the next. But, on the other hand, they are not the product of a blind necessity, and their history is not a fatal evolution. Consciousness are perpetually open to ideas and, consequently, to change. They can, therefore, escape their first impulse and modify the given direction, or, at any rate, if they persist in the original course, it is because they wished to. Finally, what sets human societies entirely apart is their remarkable tendency toward universality. Animal societies never extend beyond a tiny space, and colonies of a single species always remain distinct, often even enemies. Human societies (*les nations*), on the contrary, become more and more confused with one another; national characteristics, races, and civilizations mix and interpenetrate. Already science, art, and religions have no country. Thus, little by little a new society emerges from all the isolated and distinct groups, a society in which all others will fuse, and which will end by one day including the entire human race.

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Reading Questions

1. Durkheim begins his article by stating that society is not simply a collection of individuals; society has "its own life, own consciousness, own interests and destiny." What does he mean by society's consciousness and interests? Give examples of both.
2. Durkheim suggests that individuals have very few ideas that are completely their own. If ideas are not our own, where do they come from?
3. How do ideas become the great truths of science, dogmas of religion, or prescriptions of fashion? How does Durkheim say that these ideas become accepted as true?
4. Where do laws come from, according to Durkheim?

Credit: "Durkheim on Institutional Analysis," edited by Mark Traugott. University of Chicago Press. 1885, translated 1978.

SOCIALIZATION

Although Durkheim and Rousseau might have disagreed about what humans would be like without society, they agreed that humans are shaped by their society. Current sociological work remains focused on how this shaping occurs. How do we learn to fit into society? We gain this knowledge through **socialization,** the lifelong process of learning our society's norms, customs, and ideologies. This process also provides us with the skills necessary for participating in society, thereby helping us both to fit into society and to develop a sense of identity and self.

Socialization is understood differently depending on your theoretical perspective. Sociology has three classic theoretical perspectives that will be used throughout this book: structural functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism. Feminist and postmodernist perspectives emerged later in the discipline but are also important lenses through which we can understand the social world.

Structural Functionalism

Structural functionalism, which was particularly popular in the early years of the discipline, is mainly interested in explaining how society functions effectively. Sociologists working within the structural functionalist tradition look at how different structures or institutions in society work together to create consensus and social cohesion. A common analogy, popularized by structural functionalist Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), is that the parts of society are like organs in the human body. Just as the body is made up of various parts that need to function together properly for it to be healthy, the parts of society need to work well together for society to run smoothly. The body's purpose is to survive; therefore, its subsystems (e.g., the respiratory system or central nervous system) need to cooperate to maintain the system. For the structural functionalists, society's purpose is also to survive and reproduce itself. All the subsystems of society (e.g., the family or the education system) must work well together to keep society running smoothly.

Structural functionalists consider socialization an extremely significant part of how society functions effectively. From this perspective, socialization is a top-down process. Children internalize social rules and values through socialization

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and learn to conform to the **roles** (the behaviors, beliefs, and norms performed in social situations) and expectations of society. This helps them to become a part of society. Talcott Parsons, a prominent structural functionalist who was influenced by Durkheim, discussed the importance of socialization in his book *Family, Socialization, and Interaction Process.* According to Parsons (1955), we must all learn society's rules and values; when we all understand them, there is social conformity and consensus. The more thoroughly members of society accept and adopt the dominant rules and values, the more smoothly society will function.

Conflict Theory

Structural functionalists see socialization as a process that helps to create solidarity and cohesion. However, some sociologists argue that this perspective takes a rather rosy picture of how individuals are socialized into society. They claim that socialization is not always a harmonious process and that fitting into society as it is might not be such a great thing, given the inequality and social problems that exist. **Conflict theory** sees society and socialization in a very different way: Instead of focusing on cohesion as the foundation of society, conflict theorists suggest that human behavior and social relations result from the underlying conflicts that exist between competing groups. Conflict theory was developed by Karl Marx, who understood society as being based on the conflict between social classes—particularly the clash between individuals who own the means of production (capitalists) and those who do not (workers). We will learn more about Marx in Chapter 3, where we discuss social class and status. A common theme in this perspective is that some individuals and groups have more power than others and that the struggle over power is a key element of social life.

Many later sociologists have extended Marx's theory and applied it to conflicts based on social differences beyond class. For example, feminist sociologists focus on gender relations. Feminist theorists argue that, in virtually every society, men (and things associated with men), are held in higher regard than women (Seidman, 2008). And, as a group with social power, men have an interest in maintaining their social privilege over women (Seidman, 2008). In general, feminist theory focuses on **patriarchy,** the system of male domination in society. Feminist theorists argue that patriarchy is at least as important as class inequality in determining a person's power in life. We will learn more about feminist theory, and the different strains of this theory, in Chapter 6 on gender.

It is not surprising that the founding figures of sociology were male. This reflects the fact that sociology as a discipline emerged in a time when women were not able to attend higher education and were expected to focus on family roles instead of on work outside the home. Because of this, feminist scholars argue that sociology has traditionally been organized around men—their experiences and their positions (Seidman, 2008). Men have been both the subjects and the authors of sociology and the experiences of women have been (largely) ignored until recently (D. Smith, 1987).

Despite their underrepresentation, there have been a few trailblazing women active in early sociology. Harriet Martineau (1802–1876) is often called the first female sociologist. She translated Comte into English and wrote one of the first books on research methods. She also conducted studies of slavery and gender inequality, making a comparison between women and enslaved people in an essay titled "The Political Non-Existence of Women."

Jane Addams (1860–1935) was also an important early female sociologist. She cofounded Hull House, a shelter for the poor in Chicago where many University

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of Chicago sociologists based their research. She was a campaigner for social reform and her work challenged many taken-for-granted assumptions about the role of gender, class, and inequality in society. Her work was so ground-breaking, in fact, that FBI director J. Edgar Hoover characterized Addams as being the most dangerous woman in America in the 1920s. She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931 (Reardon, 2006). That is some great sociology!

Both conflict theorists and structural functionalists agree that socialization helps to re-create society as it is now. But whereas structural functionalists see this re-creation as positive, conflict theorists see it as negative. Conflict theorists tend to focus on questions such as, Who has the power to shape how individuals are socialized? How does socializing people to fit into society as it is benefit some groups over others? How does socialization help or hinder social inequality?

Melvin Kohn's (1959) study of parental socialization and social class illustrates how conflict theorists might think about socialization. Kohn examined how parental social class shapes the values that parents encourage in their children. He argues that, while most parents agree that children should be taught a general set of values, parents' opinions on the most important values to teach children are shaped by their social class.

Kohn (1959) interviewed 400 families—half from the working class and half from the middle class. He found significant differences when comparing the values emphasized by the mothers from these two groups. Middle-class mothers were more likely to focus on the importance of internal feelings and self-direction. For example, they tended to value empathy, happiness, self-control, and curiosity for both their sons and their daughters. Working-class mothers, however, were more likely to emphasize the importance of values that lead to conformity among their children. For example, neatness and obedience were much more likely to be highly valued by working-class mothers than by middle-class mothers. Working-class mothers also had very different expectations for boys and girls. For boys, they valued school performance and ambition highly; for girls, they tended to emphasize the importance of neatness and good manners.

How do these findings affect our understanding of socialization? A conflict theorist would highlight how the different values could reinforce the preexisting inequality between these two social classes. Valuing curiosity and happiness instead of conformity and obedience has real implications for the types of jobs that these children will be prepared to do. Most professional jobs require ambition and curiosity and could not be done well by someone who is merely obedient. The working-class mothers also perpetuate gender inequality by encouraging their sons to perform well in school and their daughters to be polite. These different traits could certainly lead to different career outcomes for boys and girls.

Symbolic Interactionism

Like structural functionalists, conflict theorists tend to think of socialization as mostly a top-down process. Some sociologists argue, however, that children also learn from one another and from their shared experiences. For example, kids on the playground learn songs and games from one another. **Symbolic interactionism** examines how socialization is negotiated through our connections with other people. Instead of seeing people as receptacles of socialization (as, some might say, structural functionalists and conflict theorists do), symbolic interactionists claim that we actively participate in our socialization. Furthermore, this group

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of sociologists does not believe that meanings naturally attach to things. Herbert Blumer (1969) elaborated on this theory in *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspectives and Methods*. In this book, he explains that symbolic interactionism contains three basic premises: humans act toward things based on the meanings they assign to them, the meaning of things is derived or arises from social interactions between people, and individuals use an interpretative process to understand and modify meanings.

Socialization not only teaches us how to interact with one another, but it also helps us develop a sense of self. In fact, sociologists believe that even something as personal as our identity and sense of self comes from others. Our own name and our nicknames are given to us by others; we think of ourselves with words and categories used and created by others; and our sense of self is assembled and constructed from the reactions of others. Symbolic interactionists are particularly interested in how we develop a sense of self through socialization.

Two important symbolic interactionists who were interested in socialization and the development of self were George Herbert Mead and Charles Horton Cooley. Mead (1934) argued that children develop their sense of self through four **stages of role-taking**. In the first, or preparatory stage, children learn to use language and other symbols by imitating the **significant others** in their lives. Significant others are key individuals—primarily parents and, to a lesser degree, older siblings and close friends—on whom young children model themselves. Children in this stage simply copy other people's actions or behaviors. For example, when you smile at a baby, she will often smile back. Babies do not necessarily understand what you are doing or why; they simply imitate your actions. They also mimic their parents by wanting to hold the objects they see their parents using, such as keys or a phone, even though they do not understand how to use such items.

The second stage, in which children pretend to be other people, is called the role-taking stage. Children engage in role-playing games, thus exhibiting several behaviors they see performed by various people in their lives. For example, many children like to play house by performing the role of mother or father. In these roles, they might cook, clean, or care for "children" (dolls).

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What is the child emulating? Where might he have learned this behavior? What other mimicking behaviors have you noticed among small children?

By about 7 years of age, children move into the third stage, the game stage. Games are different from play because they involve complex rules and require children to take the role of several other people simultaneously. For example, if you are a pitcher in a baseball game, you need to think about what you are doing while simultaneously understanding what the batter, the shortstop, and the catcher are supposed to do. You also have to remember all the rules of the game, such as when a player is allowed to run from base to base, when a player

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is out, and when an inning is over. Understanding all these roles and rules at once is quite complicated.

The final stage involves taking the role of the generalized other. Children in this stage can think of how they generally appear to other people instead of how they appear to one specific significant other, such as a parent or sibling. Do people tend to think of you as shy, smart, or funny? Understanding how a generalized other will think of you requires that you be able to take the perspective of people you may not know well or at all.

Through all these stages, individuals learn about themselves and the society in which they live. This development is not a simple matter of learning a list of rules. Instead, children interact with other people to understand the roles that these other people play, their own roles, and how they should fit into relationships with others. They must negotiate how they see themselves and their place in society through interacting with other people.

Agents of Socialization

Mead's theory highlights the importance of significant and generalized others in the process of socialization. Other theorists call these various groups of people **agents of socialization** because they guide us through the process of becoming a member of society and help to shape the people we become. There are many different agents of socialization, but we tend to consider family, peer groups, the education system, mass media, and religion to be the most important. Each of these groups teaches us how we are supposed to behave as adults in society, to perform different roles, and to function effectively within society and social groups. We sometimes learn from agents of socialization through direct teaching, such as when we learn math or reading in school. However, much socialization takes the form of latent learning, which occurs when we imitate role models, such as the people we see in the media.

Charles Horton Cooley (1902) said that our sense of self is assembled and constructed from the reactions of others. He called this process the **looking-glass self**. When we look at other people, they act as a mirror that helps us to understand how we appear. In other words, we look to others to better understand who we are.

The idea behind Cooley's theory is that we refine our sense of self in light of other's reactions. In fact, we develop a self-image based on the messages we get from others (as we understand them). This development occurs in three main steps: we imagine how others see us, we imagine how others judge our appearance, and we refine our appearance based on how we interpret such judgments. In other words, our understanding about who we are depends largely on how we see ourselves evaluated by others. Just as we see our physical body reflected in a mirror, we also see our social selves reflected in other people's reactions to us.

It is easy to see how this process might become problematic. Consider a person with an eating disorder. While this person might be a normal and healthy body weight, she might see herself as overweight and might think that others also see her in this way, even when they do not. Other people are clearly valuable sources of information for us, but we are not always good at reading what they think about us. For example, when people laugh after we say something, we cannot always tell if they are ridiculing us or if they think we just told a funny joke. As a result, we could respond to a false impression of how we appear to others. In addition, it is usually not a good idea to let other people's opinions of us shape how we feel about ourselves.

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Cooley's concept of the looking-glass self has all the key components of the symbolic interactionist perspective. It focuses on how we attach meaning to things (including ourselves) through interacting with other people. This theory is based on the idea that we learn about ourselves through interacting with others in society. Children who do not interact with others cannot learn to be a member of society or develop a sense of self.

Primary Socialization

Socialization is a lifelong process. In its earliest stage, called **primary socialization**, we learn how to become a member of society by discovering the attitudes, values, and actions that are culturally and socially appropriate. It helps to think of primary socialization as the process by which individuals learn the unwritten rules of a society, such as how to have a conversation. Family members are very important in this primary socialization since they are the first people we encounter in our lives.

Much of what we learn at this stage is not explicitly taught. Instead, it is learned through observation and imitation. For example, no one specifically tells us how far we should stand from other people when we talk with them. We learn this information by observing how our parents and other adults engage in conversations. We might not even be able to say the specific acceptable distance between conversation partners—is it 20 or 30 inches? But we can definitely tell if someone is standing too close or too far away. People who stand too close seem aggressive and rude. People who stand too far away seem uninterested and snobbish. Primary socialization teaches us unwritten rules like these.

Secondary Socialization

Next, we go through **secondary socialization,** where we learn the appropriate behaviors and attitudes of a subculture within our larger society. For example, secondary socialization could occur when people join a soccer team. When they join this smaller group, they cannot simply apply the rules they learned in primary socialization. They certainly could not seek the kind of nurturing relationship they have with their parents from their team members. Along with having to alter their behavior to fit into this new group, they also need to learn new behaviors that will mark them as a member of the group. For example, they learn how to interact with teammates, do team cheers, wear the uniform, and playfully trash talk the other team. The main difference between primary and secondary socialization is one of scale. Primary socialization refers to the process of becoming a member of larger society, while secondary socialization refers to the process of socializing someone to be a member of a *smaller* group within that society.

Primary and secondary socialization usually occur during the early years of an individual's life. However, as we age, we learn to play new roles. Two types of socialization that occur later in life, when life changes such as entering a new profession or family situation require people to incorporate new roles, are anticipatory socialization and resocialization.

Anticipatory Socialization

Anticipatory socialization refers to the process in which individuals rehearse potential roles that they may expect to take on in the future, such as the role of mother or father, or a new position at work. We can see this in Mead's theory of the development of the self—children play at being parents to rehearse for a role they might later perform. We continue to rehearse roles later in life. For

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example, medical students often practice interacting with patients to learn good bedside manner. Anticipatory socialization gives us a chance to prepare for a new role before we even begin to play it in real life. This way, we are ready for all the behaviors and responsibilities that the role will entail before we are expected to perform it.

Resocialization

People are also sometimes resocialized, whereby they take on new roles and discard former behaviors, attitudes, and values. In **resocialization,** we do not just add a new role to all the other roles we play: We replace an old role with a new one. For example, adults who retire face the prospect of resocialization when they discard their former patterns of working and the identity attached to their occupation and take on the new role of a retiree. Resocialization is sometimes a voluntary process, such as when a person has a religious conversion, emigrates to a new country, or joins the military. Other times individuals are forced to change roles. Involuntary resocialization can include role changes such as leaving prison, being fired, or being forced to enter a rehab facility. A person does not have a choice about whether to enter or leave prison, but he must discard the prisoner role for a new one when he completes his sentence.

The process of resocialization can be difficult, but many things can ease this transition. For example, ex-convicts sometimes live in halfway houses after they leave prison. Instead of having to manage on their own, they are assisted with reintegrating into society by having a structure that helps them to find work, reestablish an independent routine, and organize their time. They replace their old role as a prisoner with a new role as a free member of society.

Helen Rose Fuchs Ebaugh (1988) both experienced and wrote about resocialization. Ebaugh was a Catholic nun who left the order and married later in life. This major transformation led her to think more critically about how people generally transition from one role to another. She argues that changing roles is a common experience in modern society. In earlier societies individuals often spent their whole lives in the same town with one partner, one job, and a very limited set of experiences. Today, people move from city to city, change jobs, partner and then re-partner, and experience a multitude of other social role changes. To understand these changes, Ebaugh interviewed 185 people who were experiencing a wide range of social transformations, such as leaving jail, divorcing, leaving jobs as police officers or doctors, retiring, and changing sexual identity. Her research illustrated common stages of what she calls the role exit process. Individuals move from being disillusioned with a particular identity to searching for alternative roles, experiencing a turning point that triggers their decision to exit a past role, and, finally, creating an identity as an ex. Think about what it means to become an ex-girlfriend or boyfriend. This requires that you shed your old identity (as one half of a couple) and embrace a new role of being an ex. How do we expect exes to act? Will they be happy to see their past partners move on or do we expect that they will be jealous and bitter? The ex role in this context is clearly defined and shapes how people expect you to behave when you leave a relationship. This is why the public is often so skeptical of celebrities who consciously uncouple and try to remain friends after a divorce. They are challenging our taken-for-granted conceptions of what the role of an ex is in this context.

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Using Your Sociological Imagination

How Do Toys Socialize Us?

Daniel Dempster Photography / Alamy Stock Photo

What types of clothes do we sell to boys and girls? Girls' shirts often say "Princess," "Smile," and "Happy," and are pink, like the t-shirt of the girl shown here. Boys' shirts often have images of cars or superheroes and are blue, like the shirt of the boy. How do these clothes reinforce ideas of gender in society?

Even things as innocuous as toys are important parts of socialization. You have probably noticed that many children play with gender-specific toys. Playing with dolls, action figures, or other gendered toys is part of how children become socialized into their gender roles. While sex (being male or female) is assigned at conception and involves physical trait differences, gender (ideas of femininity and masculinity) are learned. Gender socialization is the process of learning how to behave in a way that is consistent with the gender rules and norms of your society. The play that we engage in as children is an important part of our learning to act in ways that our society deems appropriately masculine or feminine.

For example, playing with Barbies or Disney princesses and G.I. Joes or superheroes teaches children something about what a boy or girl should be like in society. Think about what you do with a Barbie doll: Usually, you simply dress her up, change her hair, and buy her accessories, such as cars and dream houses. This play reinforces the idea that physical appearance is very important for women and that material goods can help them define and demonstrate who they are. Even the newer versions of Barbie, including Doctor Barbie and Astronaut Barbie, are only distinguishable from the original by clothing and accessories. Apparently, all it takes to be a doctor is a nice lab coat and a stethoscope! Other examples of gendered toys you might have played with include Bratz dolls, Easy Bake Ovens, Cabbage Patch dolls, or My Little Ponies.

What about G.I. Joe, the "real American hero," or superhero figures? Do you dress him and change his hair, as you do with Barbie? No—you cannot even change G.I. Joe's or a superhero's outfit because it is painted on. Instead, these action figures fight with one another, reinforcing the idea that men should be aggressive and strong and that they become heroes by being violent and physically powerful. It is important to note that there is much discussion about Barbie's physical shape being an unrealistic ideal for women (which is certainly true) but little discussion of action figures' physicality, which is also unrealistic (unless you have no neck and an upper body like an upside-down triangle). Toys like Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles or toy guns also emphasize these sorts of traits for boys.

To see what toys today's children play with, visit websites such as Walmart or Target and then answer the following questions:

1. What are these toys teaching?
2. Are boys and girls encouraged to play with different types of toys? What might be the impact of such encouragement?

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3. Do toys that were traditionally gender neutral (such as Legos) now seem gendered? If so, how?

Socialization in general, and gender socialization in particular, starts very young. However, we are taught and retaught how to act according to our gender throughout our lives. Think about the bath products that you use. Deodorant, shampoo, and razors are the same across brands, but they are marketed to and priced for men and women very differently. Using the following websites as starting points, explore the Internet and your local drugstore to look at these different products and their advertisements.

Product	Men	Women
Deodorant	Old Spice (www.oldspice.com/en)	Secret (www.secret.com)
Shampoo	American Crew (www.americancrew.com)	Herbal Essences (www.herbalessences.com)
Razors	Gillette (www.gillette.com)	Schick Quattro (www.schick.com/us/en/women/lp)

Now answer these questions:

1. How are these products marketed to men and women differently?
2. What could these products and advertisements be teaching us about the ways women and men should act?
3. What products, if any, did you find that do not follow gender stereotypes?

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Methods in Depth: The Socialization of Women in the Hate Movement

Racist activism and White supremacy have a long history in the United States. However, it is not just an historical issue. The Southern Poverty Law Center (2018) estimates that there are 954 racist groups currently operating in the United States and that racist groups are present in all states. The White supremacist marches in Charlottesville and other cities in 2017 illustrate the salience of these issues. How do people become involved in these groups? Kathleen Blee argues that people are not born racist, but that they *learn* racism in racist groups. In this way, these groups socialize members into racist attitudes, behaviors, and social networks. Blee argues that the only way we can confront and disempower organized racism is by understanding how people become a part of it, how it keeps them involved over time, and why (some) people leave.

Blee's book, *Inside Organized Racism*, is a multimethod analysis of women in the racist movement (2003). She conducted participant observation of racist group events, analyzed documents produced by racist groups, and interviewed 34 women who were active members of racist groups in the United States. This mixed-methods

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approach allowed Blee to understand how women get involved in the movement and how participating in it can impact these women.

One of the most complicated parts of the study was finding women to interview. Organized racism is a challenging group to study because many people who are involved in it do not publicize their engagement. There is no list of members in racist groups that we could access to send out a survey. So, how do we contact members of racist groups and learn about their experiences? Blee began by collecting and reading all magazines, newsletters, websites, and other sources from self-proclaimed racist, anti-Semitic, White supremacist, and other racist groups. She then selected groups from this list. Once she had the smaller sample of groups, she sought to contact women within the groups who identified as racist activists. This is difficult because these women did not have their names written on group documents and tend to be highly suspicious of outsiders. Blee contacted women through either a first contact in the group (a method known as snowball sampling) or through intermediaries (such as parole officers, reporters, attorneys, and others).

This study focuses on women racist activists (instead of racist activists more generally). Blee explains that there were both theoretical and methodological reasons for this decision. Theoretically, women are the fastest growing part of the racist movement. While they had historically been quite a small part of the movement, they now account for up to 50% of new recruits (Blee, 2003). And, most studies about racist activists focus on men (who still make up most of the movement). This means that women are both critically important to study as a growing part of the movement and, so far, not well understood. In addition, Blee highlights a critical methodical reason for focusing on women. As Blee notes in the book, male racist activists would have been much more difficult for her to interview. As she explains "the intense and conflicting feelings that male racists hold about women, especially women professionals and women outside the racist movement" (Blee, 2003, 204) undermine her ability to contact and interview male activists. This highlights the importance of considering one's own position in conducting research—how one's gender, ethnicity, social class, sexuality, or other characteristics shape the research process.

A critical ethical issue that arises in studies such as Blee's work on racist women is how to engage with a group with whom you strongly disagree. Usually rapport is key to conducting interview and participant observation research. It is critical for those that we study to feel comfortable and understood by the researcher. However, the importance of rapport is based on research with groups with whom we are sympathetic. Blee is careful to note in her book that she was always clear with the women she studied that she did not agree with their racist convictions and that her own views were opposed to theirs. However, she did tell them that she would endeavor to depict them accurately.

Another issue in the study of groups such as White supremacists is the concern that this research would unintendedly give a platform for racist propaganda. Blee highlights how, on the one hand, she wants to describe these groups accurately because it is only through understanding these groups that we can determine how to deal with them and, hopefully, reduce their appeal to certain people. On the other hand, she did not want to create celebrities or icons for the movement. She decided that she would obscure biographical details of the women and their groups, even when they wanted them to be made public, in an attempt not to draw new

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members or attention to their work. Blee's work on women in racist movements is an innovative and important study of socialization that highlights some of the difficult ethical and methodological issues that come up when researching unsympathetic groups.

AGING AND SOCIALIZATION

As we have discussed, the process of learning how to become a member of society and developing an identity is shaped by the society in which we live. While it may seem as if growing up is just a natural biological process that remains unchanged over time, the culture and institutions of our society shape this process. The sociological study of aging focuses on both the social aspects of how individuals age and concerns with the general aging of the whole population. The experience of aging, and moving through the life-course, depends on social factors such as changes in public policies and programs, overarching cultural values, and norms. In addition, our understanding of the aging process, and its different stages, has changed over time.

One way that our cultural understanding of aging has changed is in the concept of childhood as a life-stage. The historian Steven Mintz (2004) explains that, prior to the 18th century, there was no idea of childhood as a separate period of life—children were just small adults-in-waiting. By the middle of the century, "childhood was increasingly viewed as a separate stage of life that required special care and institutions to protect it" (3). For example, child labor laws emerged to protect children, as a group, from the harsh realities of working in factories. During the 19th century the growing acceptance of this new ideal of childhood was evident among the middle class. Young people began living in the parental home for longer periods and were expected to obtain more formal schooling. This period also saw an increasing consciousness about young people's emotional and psychological development. These changes culminated in the development of the concept of adolescence around the beginning of the 20th century.

The notion of adolescence as a period between childhood and adulthood, in which young people learn about themselves and form identities, is also a historical invention. Our modern conception of adolescence is that it is a period when young people are rebellious, prone to dramatic displays, and engage in violent and risky behavior. Think of how television shows such as *Riverdale, The Vampire Diaries, Pretty Little Liars,* or the movie *Mean Girls* depict adolescents as impulsive, tempestuous, and emotional. This period is generally thought to be a time of storm and stress for young people (Hall, 1904).

One of the first and most important scholarly works that challenged our current ideas about adolescence as a time of turmoil and stress was *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) by anthropologist Margaret Mead (no relation to our friend George Herbert Mead). To see if our Western understanding of adolescence was a natural and biological phenomenon or a social creation, she compared the transition to adulthood in American society with the same period in Samoan society. If young Samoans also experienced adolescence as a time of storm and stress, as Hall (1904) put it, Mead would have additional evidence that such turmoil was simply the natural experience of this period of life. However, if she found that adolescence was not such a stressful period

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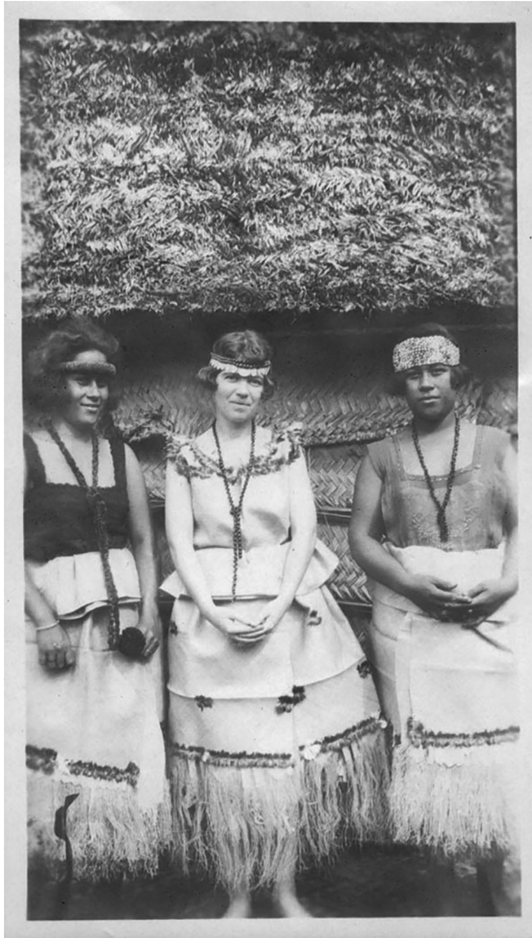

Library of Congress

Margaret Mead (center) poses with two Samoan women. Through her research, Mead found that adolescent Samoan girls were free of the teen angst experienced by Westerners. Think about how teenagers are currently depicted in the Western media: Does the media tend to depict this period as one of stress and anxiety?

in Samoa, it would lead us to question the assumption that young people are always dramatic, rebellious, and in search of their identity at this stage of their lives.

Mead (1928) engaged in participant observation in three villages in Samoa. She lived in these villages and (with the help of an interpreter) interviewed 68 young women between the ages of 9 and 20. She found that, compared with Western societies, adolescence in Samoa was not a stressful time. She attributed this finding to cultural differences between Samoa and Western countries. While Mead's book on this research was very popular and generally well received, some argued that she failed to recognize how Samoan society was changing over time, as all societies do. Instead, critics argued that she presented Samoan society as being stagnant. Despite this concern, the research highlights how something that appears natural could be a product of the culture and institutions of society.

Popular movies and television shows often focus on the struggles that young people have when transitioning to adulthood. Television shows such as *Friends, Girls,* and *Master of None* focus on the prolonged period during which young people transition into adulthood. Sociologists have long been interested in how individuals move through life stages and how larger institutions of society can shape these transitions. Frank Furstenberg and his colleagues (Furstenberg, Kennedy, McLoyd, Rumbaut, & Settersten, 2004) focus particularly on the transition to adulthood in modern society. They argue that our ideas about becoming an adult have changed and that these changes are related to larger historical transformations in society.

What does it take to be considered an adult? Do you feel like an adult? Furstenberg argues that there are seven traditional markers of adulthood: completing education, attaining financial independence, working full time, being able to support a family, leaving the parental home, getting married, and having a child. With these markers in mind, a full 65% of American men and 77% of American women had reached adulthood and done all seven of these things by age 30 in 1960. By 2000, though, only 31% of men and 46% of women had completed these steps by that age (Furstenberg et al., 2004).

More-recent data show that young people are certainly staying in the family home longer than they did only 10 years ago. In 2005 26% of Americans aged 18 to 34 lived in their parent's home. By 2015 a full 34% lived with their parents. Comparing childbearing across time also shows that the transition to adulthood is being delayed (see Figure 2.1). In 1994 50% of women were mothers by the age of 24. By 2014 it took until age 27 for 50% of women to have given birth to their first child (see Figure 2.2).

It is important to note, however, that our idea of adulthood and what it takes to be considered an adult has changed over time. While marriage and children

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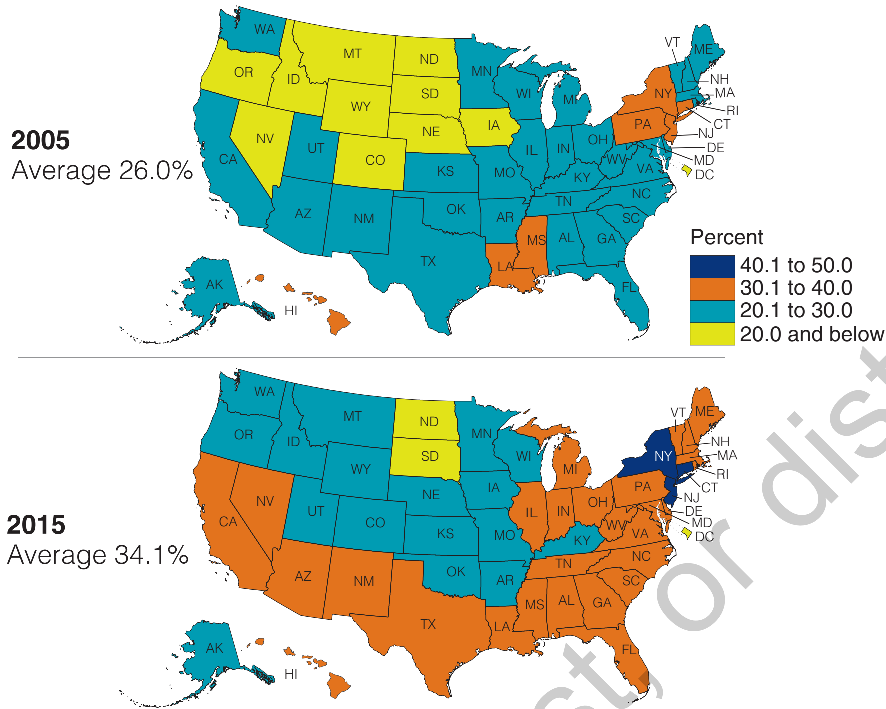
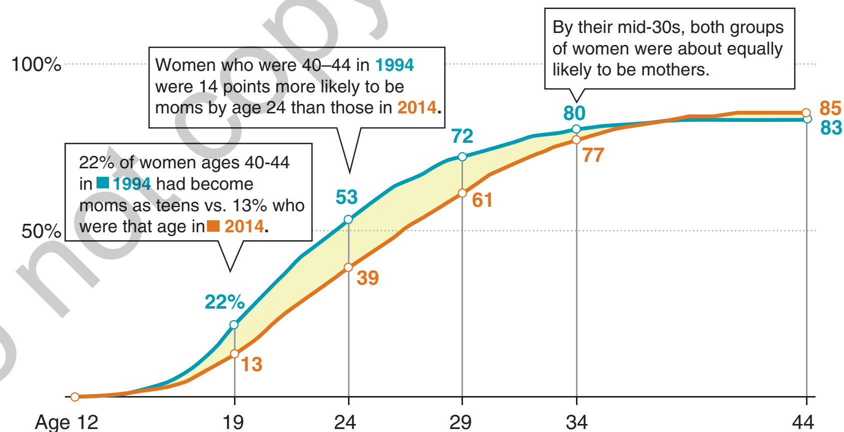
Figure 2.1 /// Young Adults Living at Home, 2005 and 2015



Source: 2005 and 2015 American Community Survey.

Figure 2.2 /// Women and Childbirth



Note: The 1994 time point is based on combined data from 1992 and 1995. Age at first birth is not available in the 1994 data.) The 2014 time point is based on combined data from 2012, 2014, and 2016.

Source: Livingston, Gretchen. "They're Waiting Longer, but U.S. Women Today More Likely to Have Children Than a Decade Aga." Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C. (January 18, 2019) https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2018/01/18/theyre-waiting-longer-but-u-s-women-today-more-likely-to-have-children-than-a-decade-ago/.

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were critical markers of adulthood in the 1950s, particularly for women, they are no longer seen this same way. In fact, Furstenberg finds that only slightly more than half of Americans still see marriage and having children as important parts of what makes someone an adult (Furstenberg et al., 2004). Markers such as moving out of the parental home, completing education, and getting a job remain important components of how we see adulthood in contemporary society, but these transitions are increasingly difficult for individuals to achieve and take longer for them to complete.

Why does the transition to adulthood take longer today than it did in the past? It is easy to argue that this results from the different character of young people today—sometimes people say that young people are simply not working hard enough or are entitled. These explanations see the problem of delayed adulthood as a personal trouble that young people face in modern times. Remember that C. Wright Mills saw personal troubles as problems that affect individuals. However, this delayed adulthood is also a public issue, a problem that exists on a social level and has social causes. For example, programs that helped young people who fought in World War II attend university, which were discussed in Chapter 1, made college more affordable for a whole cohort of young people. Higher tuition and expenses associated with going to college and the increased cost of housing make it more difficult for young people to become financially independent today. Finally, it takes longer to complete education and secure a full-time, good paying job than it did in the past. For all these reasons, it is simply not true that young people today are at fault for having trouble making a smooth transition to adulthood. Instead, the larger social structure is creating more barriers to this transition and there are fewer programs to assist young people in overcoming barriers.

As stated earlier, aging research is centrally concerned with different phases of the life-course and changes in our understanding of these phases. This research also examines the aging of the population and the implications of this aging for society. American society is aging. The U.S. Census Bureau projects that by 2020, for the first time in human history, there will be more people aged 65 and older than there are children under age 5 (Ortman, Velkoff, & Hogan, 2014).

The fastest growing age group in the United States is seniors. This trend is expected to continue for the next several decades, mainly due to low fertility rates and increasing life expectancies. Figure 2.3 shows the age structure of the U.S. population for selected years, and that the percentage of people under the age of 18 is decreasing while the percentage of people in the over-65 age categories is increasing. Figure 2.3 predicts the percentage of the population over the age of 65 and shows that, by 2030, one in five Americans will be a senior. At this time, there will be roughly the same number of seniors as young people under age 18 in the United States. The number of seniors will more than double between 2014 and 2060 (Mather, Jacobsen, & Pollard, 2015).

The aging of the population has serious social and economic implications. The growth of the senior portion of the population will have a serious impact on Social Security and Medicare, programs specifically targeted at seniors (see Figure 2.4). For example, Social Security and Medicare will each account for 6% of the GDP by 2050 (see Figure 2.5). With the increased size of the over-65 group, there is also a decreased proportion of working-age individuals to support social services. As Figure 2.6 shows, in 1900 there were 13.6 working-age

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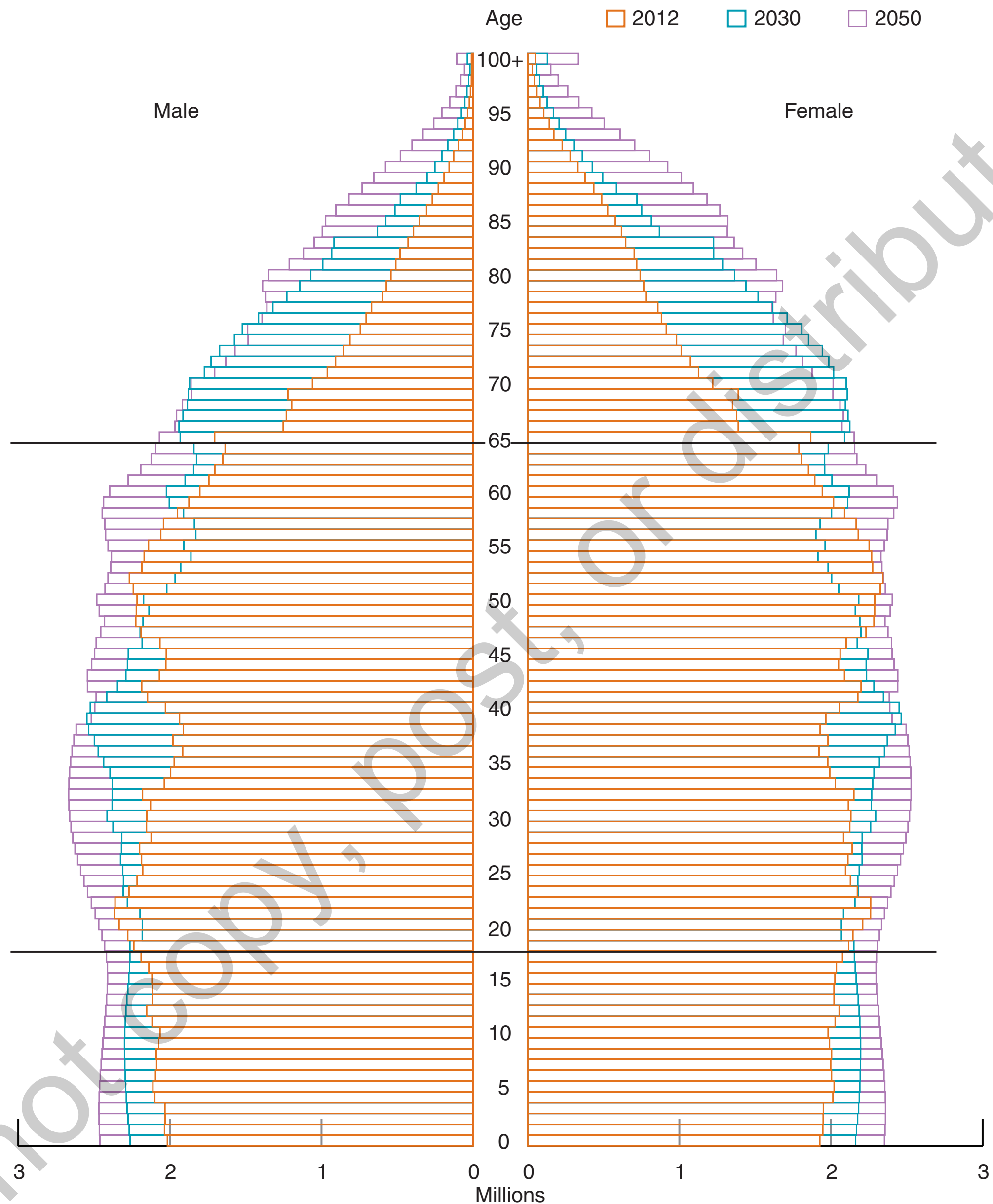
Figure 2.3 /// Age and Sex Structure of the Population for the United States: 2012, 2030, and 2050



Source: US Census Bureau, 2012 Population Estimates and 2012 National Projections.

persons for each senior. This number decreased to 4.3 working-age persons per senior in 2014 and is projected to decline further to 2.4 by 2060. This means that there are fewer working-age people paying taxes to support social programs in general, including those for seniors such as Social Security and Medicare (see Figures 2.5 and 2.6).

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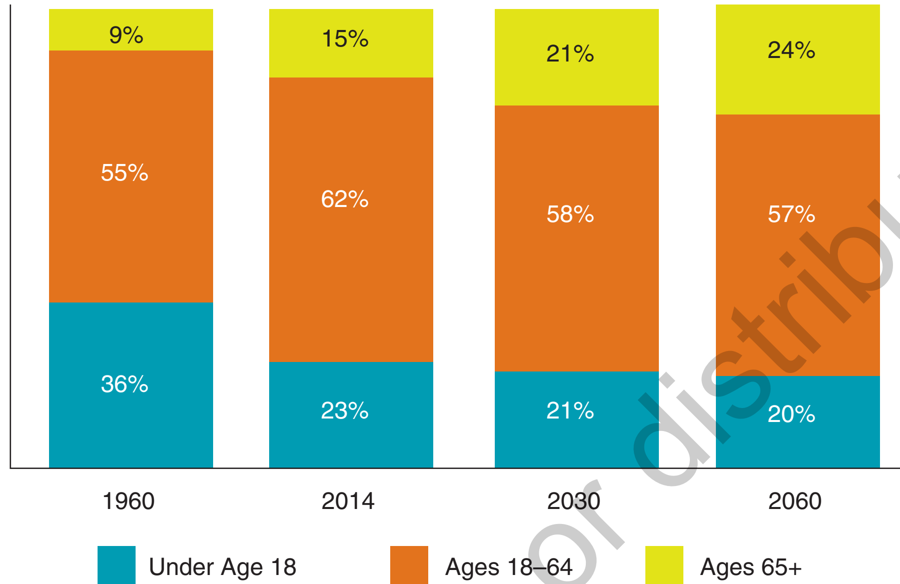
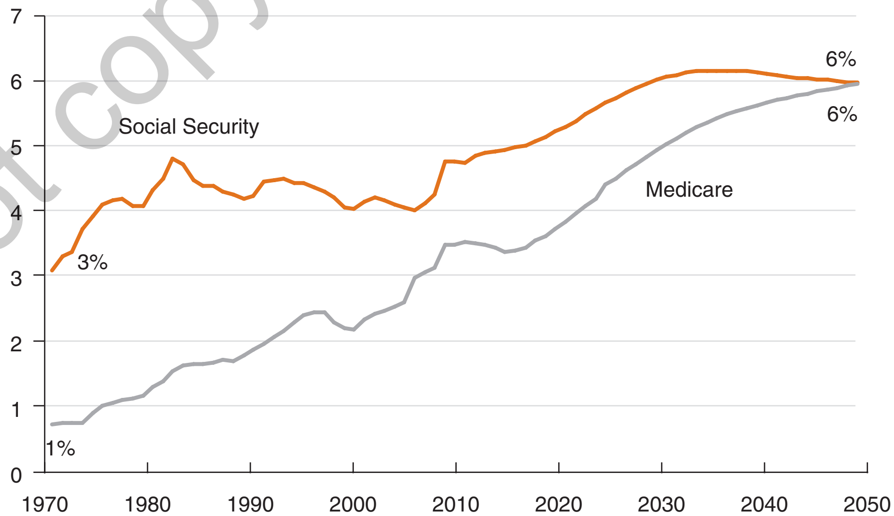
Figure 2.4 /// Percent of U.S. Population in Selected Age Groups, 1960, 2014, 2030, 2060



Note: Numbers may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Source: Mather, Mark et al. "Aging in the United States." *Population Bulletin*, Vol. 70, No. 2, December 2015. Population Reference Bureau.

Figure 2.5 /// Projected Social Security and Medicare Expenditures as a Percentage of GDP, 1970–2050



Source: Mather, Mark et al. "Aging in the United States." *Population Bulletin*, Vol. 70, No. 2, December 2015. Population Reference Bureau.

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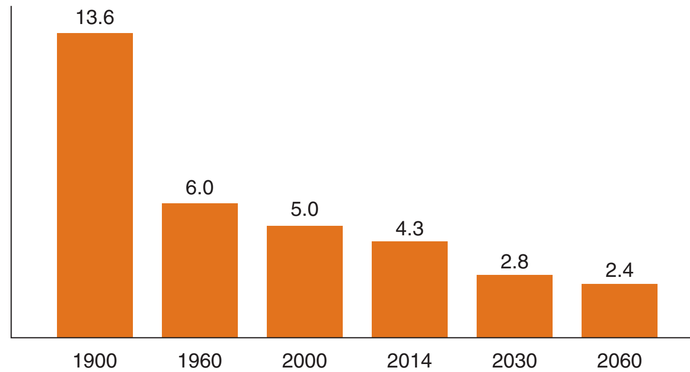
Figure 2.6 /// Elderly Support Ratio, Selected Decades



Source: Mather, Mark et al. "Aging in the United States." *Population Bulletin*, Vol. 70, No. 2, December 2015. Population Reference Bureau.

THE PERFORMANCE OF SOCIAL ROLES

An important part of socialization is the process of learning to perform roles. Shakespeare thought a lot about how people play roles in society. In *As You Like It,* he wrote, "All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players." Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman (1922–1982) shared this view when he created the **dramaturgical perspective**, seeing social life as a stage and individuals as actors portraying roles.

Goffman is considered one of the most influential sociologists of the 20th century. He believed that, when we meet others, we work to influence their impression of us (Goffman, 1959): We want to manage the impression that we give to others. We can do this by changing our setting or appearance, perhaps selecting our clothing to give off a certain impression. And, this process is iterative: While we try to shape our conversation partner's impression of us, she tries to form the most accurate impression possible. Like other symbolic interactionists, Goffman was interested in how individuals interact with others to create an impression and to gauge the impressions given off by others.

Goffman also believed that individuals try to smooth out social interaction to make it easier and more comfortable for everyone. To do this we constantly work to avoid embarrassing others or ourselves. For example, if someone slips and falls, we might help them up and then casually say, "The floor is a bit wet, I find it slippery too," so that they feel less embarrassed. The challenge is that the behaviors that are appropriate or least likely to cause embarrassment differ across situations. For example, it is acceptable to yell and sing loudly at a football game but probably not in class. Therefore, we must learn to tailor how we act based on the situation. We must be able to take our stage of action into account when deciding how to behave and then modify our behavior accordingly.

For example, if you have a job interview, you might practice parts of your performance in advance, thinking of how you would answer questions that might be asked. You would certainly think about your clothing and appearance, since you want to look like you fit in the new workplace. If everyone wears a suit, perhaps you should too. If the interview is for a creative job, such as at an advertising agency or

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media company, you would perhaps choose to present a more artistic self with an interesting necklace or funky patterned socks. You manage the impression you give, and the props you use to do so, based on the social situation.

In social interaction, as in the theatre, there is a front stage where we perform. This is where actors work to make a positive impression on others. But there is also a backstage that includes the private places where individuals do not feel they are being watched, with no audience.

The concepts of front stage and backstage are easy to see in many social settings. Think about restaurant workers. How are they different when they are front stage in the restaurant (where they are serving tables for customers) versus backstage (in the kitchen or dishwashing area)? Workers tend to maintain a calm demeanor and a cheerful disposition in the front of the restaurant, while they might complain and joke around backstage. Although we often prepare for the front stage by thinking about what impression we hope to make, we are sometimes caught out of character when someone unexpectedly sees us in our backstage. For example, a customer walking past a restaurant's kitchen to get to the restroom may see the servers in their backstage, perhaps having a drink or complaining about the customers.

READING: FROM *THE PRESENTATION OF SELF IN EVERYDAY LIFE*

By Erving Goffman

The following reading is from Goffman's most famous book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). In this excerpt, Goffman explains the dramaturgical model, which has been very influential in many areas of sociology. As you read the following pages, consider what this theory tells us about social interaction and socialization. How do we learn to interact with others? How is this process like the theatre?

When an individual enters the presence of others, they commonly seek to acquire information about him or to bring into play information about him already possessed. They will be interested in his general socio-economic status, his conception of self, his attitude toward them, his competence, his trustworthiness, etc. Although some of this information seems to be sought almost as an end in itself, there are usually quite practical reasons for acquiring it. Information about the individual helps to define the situation, enabling others to know in advance what he will expect of them and what they may expect of him. Informed in these ways, the others will know how best to act in order to call forth a desired response from him.

For those present, many sources of information become accessible and many carriers (or "sign-vehicles") become available for conveying this information. If unacquainted with the individual, observers can glean clues from his conduct and appearance which allow them to apply their previous experience with individuals roughly similar to the one before them or, more important, to apply untested stereotypes to him. They can also assume from past experience that only individuals of a particular kind are likely to be found in a given social setting. They can rely on what the individual says about himself or on documentary evidence he provides as to who and what he is. If they know, or know of, the individual by virtue of experience prior to the interaction, they

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can rely on assumptions as to the persistence and generality of psychological traits as a means of predicting his present and future behavior.

However, during the period in which the individual is in the immediate presence of the others, few events may occur which directly provide the others with the conclusive information they will need if they are to direct wisely their own activity. Many crucial facts lie beyond the time and place of interaction or lie concealed within it. For example, the "true" or "real" attitudes, beliefs, and emotions of the individual can be ascertained only indirectly, through his avowals or through what appears to be involuntary expressive behavior. . . .

The expressiveness of the individual (and therefore his capacity to give impressions) appears to involve two radically different kinds of sign activity: the expression that he gives, and the expression that he *gives off.* The first involves verbal symbols or their substitutes which he uses admittedly and solely to convey the information that he and the others are known to attach to these symbols. This is communication in the traditional and narrow sense. The second involves a wide range of action that others can treat as symptomatic of the actor, the expectation being that the action was performed for reasons other than the information conveyed in this way. As we shall have to see, this distinction has an only initial validity. The individual does of course intentionally convey misinformation by means of both of these types of communication, the first deceit, the second feigning. . . .

Let us now turn from the others to the point of view of the individual who presents himself before them. He may wish them to think highly of him, or to think that he thinks highly of them, or to perceive how in fact he feels toward them, or to obtain no clear-cut impression; he may wish to ensure sufficient harmony so that the interaction can be sustained, or to defraud, get rid of, confuse, mislead, antagonize, or insult them. Regardless of the particular objective which the individual has in mind and of his motive for having this objective, it will be in his interests to control the conduct of the others, especially their responsive treatment of him.[1] This control is achieved largely by influencing the definition of the situation which the others come to formulate, and he can influence this definition by expressing himself in such a way as to give them the kind of impression that will lead them to act voluntarily in accordance with his own plan. Thus, when an individual appears in the presence of others, there will usually be some reason for him to mobilize his activity so that it will convey an impression to others which it is in his interests to convey. Since a girl's dormitory mates will glean evidence of her popularity from the calls she receives on the phone, we can suspect that some girls will arrange for calls to be made, and Willard Waller's finding can be anticipated:

> It has been reported by many observers that a girl who is called to the telephone in the dormitories will often allow herself to be called several times, in order to give all the other girls ample opportunity to hear her paged.[2]

Of the two kinds of communication—expressions given and expressions given off—this report will be primarily concerned with the latter, with

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the more theatrical and contextual kind, the nonverbal, presumably unintentional kind, whether this communication be purposely engineered or not. As an example of what we must try to examine, I would like to cite at length a novelistic incident in which Preedy, a vacationing Englishman, makes his first appearance on the beach of his summer hotel in Spain:

> But in any case he took care to avoid catching anyone's eye. First of all, he had to make it clear to those potential companions of his holiday that they were of no concern to him whatsoever. He stared through them, round them, over them—eyes lost in space. The beach might have been empty. If by chance a ball was thrown his way, he looked surprised; then let a smile of amusement lighten his face (Kindly Preedy), looked round dazed to see that there *were* people on the beach, tossed it back with a smile to himself and not a smile *at* the people, and then resumed carelessly his nonchalant survey of space.
>
> But it was time to institute a little parade, the parade of the Ideal Preedy. By devious handlings he gave any who wanted to look a chance to see the title of his book—a Spanish translation of Homer, classic thus, but not daring, cosmopolitan too—and then gathered together his beach-wrap and bag into a neat sand-resistant pile (Methodical and Sensible Preedy), rose slowly to stretch at ease his huge frame (Big-Cat Preedy), and tossed aside his sandals (Carefree Preedy, after all).
>
> The marriage of Preedy and the sea! There were alternative rituals. The first involved the stroll that turns into a run and a dive straight into the water, thereafter smoothing into a strong splashless crawl towards the horizon. But of course not really to the horizon. Quite suddenly he would turn on to his back and thrash great white splashes with his legs, somehow thus showing that he could have swum further had he wanted to, and then would stand up a quarter out of water for all to see who it was.
>
> The alternative course was simpler, it avoided the cold-water shock and it avoided the risk of appearing too high-spirited. The point was to appear to be so used to the sea, the Mediterranean, and this particular beach, that one might as well be in the sea as out of it. It involved a slow stroll down and into the edge of the water—not even noticing his toes were wet, land and water all the same to *him*!—with his eyes up at the sky gravely surveying portents, invisible to others, of the weather (Local Fisherman Preedy).[3]

The novelist means us to see that Preedy is improperly concerned with the extensive impressions he feels his sheer bodily action is giving off to those around him. We can malign Preedy further by assuming that he has acted merely in order to give a particular impression, that this is a false impression, and that the others present receive either no impression at all, or, worse still, the impression that Preedy is affectedly trying to cause them to receive this particular impression. But the important point for us here is that the kind of impression Preedy thinks he is making is in fact the kind of impression that others correctly and incorrectly glean from someone in their midst. . . .

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There is one aspect of the others' response that bears special comment here. Knowing that the individual is likely to present himself in a light that is favorable to him, the others may divide what they witness into two parts; a part that is relatively easy for the individual to manipulate at will, being chiefly his verbal assertions, and a part in regard to which he seems to have little concern or control, being chiefly derived from the expressions he gives off. The others may then use what are considered to be the ungovernable aspects of his expressive behavior as a check upon the validity of what is conveyed by the governable aspects. In this a fundamental asymmetry is demonstrated in the communication process, the individual presumably being aware of only one stream of his communication, the witnesses of this stream and one other. For example, in Shetland Isle one crofter's wife, in serving native dishes to a visitor from the mainland of Britain, would listen with a polite smile to his polite claims of liking what he was eating; at the same time she would take note of the rather rapidity with which the visitor lifted his fork or spoon to his mouth, the eagerness with which he passed food into his mouth, and the gusto expressed in chewing the food, using these signs as a check on the stated feelings of the eater. The same woman, in order to discover what one acquaintance (A) "actually" thought of another acquaintance (B), would wait until B was in the presence of A but engaged in conversation with still another person (C). She would then covertly examine the facial expressions of A as he regarded B in conversation with C. Not being in conversation with B, and not being directly observed by him, A would sometimes relax usual constraints and tactful deceptions, and freely express what he was "actually" feeling about B. This Shetlander, in short, would observe the unobserved observer.

Now given the fact that others are likely to check up on the more controllable aspects of behavior by means of the less controllable, one can expect that sometimes the individual will try to exploit this very possibility, guiding the impression he makes through behavior felt to be reliably informing.[4] . . . A specific illustration may be cited from Shetland Isle. When a neighbor dropped in to have a cup of tea, he would ordinarily wear at least a hint of an expectant warm smile as he passed through the door into the cottage. Since lack of physical obstructions outside the cottage and lack of light within it usually made it possible to observe the visitor unobserved as he approached the house, islanders sometimes took pleasure in watching the visitor drop whatever expression he was manifesting and replace it with a sociable one just before reaching the door. However, some visitors, in appreciating that this examination was occurring, would blindly adopt a social face a long distance from the house, thus ensuring the projection of a constant image. . . .

In everyday life, of course, there is a clear understanding that first impressions are important. . . . When the interaction that is initiated by "first impressions" is itself merely the initial interaction in an extended series of interactions involving the same participants, we speak of "getting off on the right foot" and feel that it is crucial that we do so. . . .

In stressing the fact that the initial definition of the situation projected by an individual tends to provide a plan for the co-operative activity that

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follows—in stressing this action point of view—we must not overlook the crucial fact that any projected definition of the situation also has a distinctive moral character. It is this moral character of projections that will chiefly concern us in this report. Society is organized on the principle that any individual who possesses certain social characteristics has a moral right to expect that others will value and treat him in an appropriate way. Connected with this principle is a second, namely that an individual who implicitly or explicitly signifies that he has certain social characteristics ought in fact to be what he claims he is. In consequence, when an individual projects a definition of the situation and thereby makes an implicit or explicit claim to be a person of a particular kind, he automatically exerts a moral demand upon the others, obliging them to value and treat him in the manner that persons of his kind have a right to expect. He also implicitly foregoes all claims to be things he does not appear to be[5] and hence foregoes the treatment that would be appropriate for such individuals. The others find, then, that the individual has informed them as to what is and as to what they *ought* to see as the "is."

One cannot judge the importance of definitional disruptions by the frequency with which they occur, for apparently they would occur more frequently were not constant precautions taken. We find that preventive practices are constantly employed to avoid these embarrassments and that corrective practices are constantly employed to compensate for discrediting occurrences that have not been successfully avoided. When the individual employs these strategies and tactics to protect his own projections, we may refer to them as "defensive practices"; when a participant employs them to save the definition of the situation projected by another, we speak of "protective practices" or "tact." Together, defensive and protective practices comprise the techniques employed to safeguard the impression fostered by an individual during his presence before others. It should be added that while we may be ready to see that no fostered impression would survive if defensive practices were not employed, we are less ready perhaps to see that few impressions could survive if those who received the impression did not exert tact in their reception of it.

In addition to the fact that precautions are taken to prevent disruption of projected definitions, we may also note that an intense interest in these disruptions comes to play a significant role in the social life of the group. Practical jokes and social games are played in which embarrassments which are to be taken unseriously are purposely engineered.[6] Fantasies are created in which devastating exposures occur. Anecdotes from the past—real, embroidered, or fictitious—are told and retold, detailing disruptions which occurred, almost occurred, or occurred and were admirably resolved. There seems to be no grouping which does not have a ready supply of these games, reveries, and cautionary tales, to be used as a source of humor, a catharsis for anxieties, and a sanction for inducing individuals to be modest in their claims and reasonable in their projected expectations. The individual may tell himself through dreams of getting into impossible positions. Families tell of the time a guest got his dates mixed and arrived when neither the house nor anyone in it was ready

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for him. Journalists tell of times when an all-too-meaningful misprint occurred, and the paper's assumption of objectivity or decorum was humorously discredited. Public servants tell of times a client ridiculously misunderstood form instructions, giving answers which implied an unanticipated and bizarre definition of the situation.[7] Seamen, whose home away from home is rigorously he-man, tell stories of coming back home and inadvertently asking mother to "pass the fucking butter."[8] Diplomats tell of the time a near-sighted queen asked a republican ambassador about the health of his king.[9]

To summarize, then, I assume that when an individual appears before others he will have many motives for trying to control the impression they receive of the situation. . . .

Notes

1. Here I owe much to an unpublished paper by Tom Burns of the University of Edinburgh. He presents the argument that in all interaction a basic underlying theme is the desire of each participant to guide and control the responses made by the others present. A similar argument has been advanced by Jay Haley in a recent unpublished paper, but in regard to a special kind of control, that having to do with defining the nature of the relationship of those involved in the interaction.
2. Willard Waller, "The Rating and Dating Complex," *American Sociological Review,* 2, 730.
3. William Sansom, *A Contest of Ladies* (London: Hograth, 1956), 230–31.
4. The widely read and rather sound writings of Stephen Potter are concerned in part with signs that can be engineered to give a shrewd observer the apparently incidental cues he needs to discover concealed virtues the gamesman does not in fact possess.
5. This role of the witness in limiting what it is the individual can be has been stressed by Existentialists, who see it as a basic threat to individual freedom. See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness,* trans. by Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956).
6. Goffman, op. cit., pp. 31927.
7. Peter Blau, "Dynamics of Bureaucracy" (PhD dissertation, Department of Sociology, Columbia University, forthcoming, University of Chicago Press), pp. 127–29.
8. Walter M. Beattie, Jr., "The Merchant Seaman" (unpublished MA Report, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago, 1950), p. 35.
9. Sir Frederick Posonby, *Recollections of Three Reigns* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1951).

Reading Questions

1. What is Goffman's distinction between expressions that one gives and expressions that one gives off? What is Goffman referring to when he uses the terms "face-to-face interaction," "projective techniques," "defensive practices," and "protective practices/tact"?

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2. a. Imagine you are about to visit or e-mail your professor to ask a question about an upcoming exam. In terms of the expressions you give and expressions you give off, how could you ensure that your professor infers that you are a smart student?

   b. Imagine you are preparing for a date that you have been looking forward to for several days. Your goal is to have fun and to ensure that your partner infers that you are a cool person. How might you accomplish this goal?

   c. Is there a difference between how you would act in each situation? Why or why not? Which is the real you?

3. Goffman seems to imply that individuals have considerable control over how others perceive them and that these perceptions are largely the result of face-to-face interactions. What are some other factors that might influence the perceptions others have of you? For example, how might power, inequalities, or history influence a person's perceptions of you?

Credit: Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (*1959*), Doubleday.

Using Your Sociological Imagination

Performing the Self Online

Who are we in a social media age? Clara Dollar ponders this question in her essay "My (So Called) Instagram Life" published in the *New York Times* (2017). She describes meeting a man online and the self she displayed in this process:

> "You're like a cartoon character," he said. "Always wearing the same thing every day."
>
> He meant it as an intimate observation, the kind you can make only after spending a lot of time getting to know each other. You flip your hair to the right. You only eat ice cream out of mugs. You always wear a black leather jacket. I know you.
>
> And he did know me. Rather, he knew the caricature of me that I had created and meticulously cultivated. The me I broadcast to the world on Instagram and Facebook. The witty, creative me, always detached and never cheesy or needy.
>
> That version of me got her start online as my social media persona, but over time (and I suppose for the sake of consistency), she bled off the screen and overtook my real-life personality, too. And once you master what is essentially an onstage performance of yourself, it can be hard to break character.

Clara's story unpacks how she presents herself online and the thought that goes into this process. Is this Instagram self her real self? Or is her presentation of self offline (face to face) her real self? And what about the differences across her social media presentations—Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat? In this activity, consider how you present yourself online and how these different representations relate to Goffman's dramaturgical model.

First, take a look at your online presence. Are you on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, or other social media? If so, answer the following questions about yourself. If you are not on social media, find a celebrity or public figure, look at their various social media profiles, and answer the following questions about this person.

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1. How do you (or your celebrity) appear online? How is this the same, or different, from how you are in real life when face to face with someone? Why might there be differences?
2. How can we use Goffman's dramaturgical model to understand the presentation of self online? What is front stage and what is backstage? How might people break character online? What are the impressions given and impressions given off online?
3. Are you (or your celebrity) different across your different profiles? Why are you consistent or different? What does this tell you about the complexity of the self?
4. Some people have fake profiles: Profiles on these platforms that are not made under their real names. Why might someone create a fake profile? Does this tell us anything about their sense of self or their identity?

/// SUMMARY

In this chapter we have learned how socialization helps individuals become members of society. Socialization is important because it is the process of both learning the rules and norms of society and developing a sense of identity. Sociologists from different theoretical traditions look at this process in a variety of ways. Sociologists in the structural functionalist tradition, such as Durkheim and Parsons, tend to focus on how socialization helps society run smoothly and creates social cohesion. Conflict theorists, such as Marx, focus on how socialization may reinforce the inequality in society. Symbolic interactionists, such as George Herbert Mead, Cooley, and Goffman, see socialization as something that is negotiated throughout social life. Socialization is generally understood as a complicated, lifelong process that is shaped by a variety of individuals and institutions. For example, many different agents of socialization, such as the family and peer groups, help to form the people we become as adults. This process is also shaped by the culture and history of our society. Looking at the invention of adolescence and the changing transition to adulthood highlights how our understanding of the way that individuals become adults has changed.

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