Whether at the micro, meso, or macro level, our close family and friends plus various organizations help us learn how to be human and humane in our society. Skills are taught, as are values such as loyalty and caregiving.
Local Organizations, families, and local clubs as socializing agents

National Organizations, Institutions, and Ethnic Subcultures

Political parties and religious denominations transmit values

Macro: Socialization for national loyalty and patriotism

Macro: Socialization for tolerance and respect across borders

Me (and My Significant Others)

Meso: Family, networks of friends, and local clubs as socializing agents
Ram, a first grader from India, had been attending school in Iowa for only a couple of weeks. The teacher was giving the first test. Ram did not know much about what a test meant, but he rather liked school, and the red-haired girl next to him, Elyse, had become a friend. He was catching on to reading a bit faster than she, but she was better at the number exercises. They often helped each other learn while the teacher was busy with a small group in the front of the class.

The teacher gave each child the test, and Ram saw that it had to do with numbers. He began to do what the teacher instructed the children to do with the worksheet, but after a while, he became confused. He leaned over to look at the page Elyse was working on. She hid her sheet from him, an unexpected response. The teacher looked up and asked what was going on. Elyse said that Ram was “cheating.” Ram was not quite sure what that meant, but it did not sound good. The teacher’s scolding of Ram left him baffled, confused, and entirely humiliated.

This incident was Ram’s first lesson in the individualism and competitiveness that govern Western-style schools. He was being socialized into a new set of values. In his parents’ culture, competitiveness was discouraged, and individualism was equated with selfishness and rejection of community. Athletic events were designed to end in a tie so that no one would feel rejected. Indeed, a well-socialized person would rather lose in a competition than cause someone else to feel bad because he or she lost.

Socialization is the lifelong process of learning to become a member of the social world, beginning at birth and continuing until death. It is a major part of what the family, education, religion, and other institutions do to prepare individuals to be members of their social world. Like Ram, each of us learns the values and beliefs of our culture. In Ram’s case, he literally moved from one cultural group to another and had to adjust to more than one culture within his social world.

Have you ever interacted with a newborn human baby? Infants are interactive, ready to develop into members of the social world. As they cry, coo, or smile, they gradually learn that their behaviors elicit responses from other humans. This exchange of messages—this interaction—is the basic building block of socialization. Out of this process of interaction, a child learns its culture and becomes a member of society. This process of interaction shapes the infant into a human being with a social self—perceptions we have of who we are.

Three main elements provide the framework for socialization: human biological potential, culture, and individual experiences. Babies enter this world unsocialized, totally dependent on others to meet their needs, and completely lacking in social awareness and an understanding of the
rules of their society. Despite this complete vulnerability, they have the potential to learn the language, norms, values, and skills needed in their society. They gradually learn who they are and what is expected of them. Socialization is necessary not only for the survival of the individual but also for the survival of society and its groups. The process continues in various forms throughout our lives as we enter and exit various positions—from school to work to retirement to death.

In this chapter, we will explore the nature of socialization and how individuals become socialized. We consider why socialization is important. We also look at development of the self, socialization through the life cycle, who or what socializes us, macro-level issues in the socialization process, and a policy example illustrating socialization. First, we briefly examine an ongoing debate: Which is more influential in determining who we are—our genes (nature) or our socialization into the social world (nurture)?

**Nature Versus Nurture—or Both Working Together?**

What is it that most makes us who we are? Is it our biological makeup or the environment in which we are raised that guides our behavior and the development of our self? One side of the contemporary debate regarding nature versus nurture seeks to explain the development of the self and human social behaviors—violence, crime, academic performance, mate selection, economic success, gender roles, and other behaviors too numerous to mention here—by examining biological or genetic factors (Harris 2009; Winkler 1991). Sociologists call this sociobiology, and psychologists refer to it as evolutionary psychology. The theory claims that our human genetic makeup wires us for social behaviors (Wilson et al. 1978).

The idea is that we perpetuate our own biological family lines and the human species through various social behaviors. Human groups develop power structures, are territorial, and protect their kin. A mother ignoring her own safety to help a child, soldiers dying in battle for their comrades and countries, communities feeling hostility toward outsiders or foreigners, and neighbors defending property lines against intrusion by neighbors are all examples of behaviors that sociobiologists claim are rooted in genetic makeup of the species. Sociobiologists would say these behaviors continue because they result in an increased chance of survival of the species as a whole (Lerner 1992; Lumsden and Wilson 1981; Wilson 1980, 1987).

Most sociologists believe that sociobiology and evolutionary psychology explanations have flaws. If social behavior is genetically programmed, then it should manifest itself regardless of the culture in which humans are raised. Yet there are vast differences between cultures, especially in gender behaviors and traits. The range of differences would not occur if we were biologically hardwired to certain behaviors. In Chapter 1, for example, we saw that in some societies men wear makeup and are gossipy and vain, violating our stereotypes. The key is that what makes humans unique is not our biological heritage but our ability to learn the complex social arrangements of our culture.

Most sociologists recognize that individuals are influenced by biology, which limits the range of human responses and creates certain needs and drives, but they believe that nurture is far more important as the central force in shaping human social behavior through the socialization process. Many sociologists now consider the interplay of nature and nurture. Alice Rossi (1984) has argued that we need to build both biological and social theories—or biosocial theories—into explanations of social processes such as parenting. Just in the twenty-first century, a few sociologists are developing an approach called evolutionary sociology that takes seriously the way our genetic makeup—including a remarkable capacity for language—shapes our range of behaviors. However, it is also very clear from biological research that living organisms are often modified by their environments and the behaviors of others around them—with even genetic structure changing (Lopreato 2001; Machalek and Martin 2010). In short, biology influences human behavior, but interactive behavior can also modify biological traits. Indeed, nutritional history of grandparents can affect the metabolism of their grandchildren, and what the grandparents ate was largely shaped by cultural ideas about food (BBC’s Science and Nature 2009; Freese, Powell, and Steelman 1999; Rossi 1984). The point is that socialization is key in the process of “becoming human and humane.”

**The Importance of Socialization**

If you have lived on a farm, watched animals in the wild, or seen television nature shows, you probably have noticed that many animal young become independent shortly after birth. Horses are on their feet in a matter of hours, and the parents of turtles are long gone by the time the babies hatch from eggs. Many species in the animal kingdom do not require contact with adults to survive because their behaviors are inborn and instinctual. Generally speaking, the more intelligent the species, the longer the period of gestation and of nutritional and social dependence on the mother and family. Humans clearly take the longest time to socialize their young. Even among primates, human infants have the longest gestation and dependency period,
generally six to eight years. Chimpanzees, very similar to humans in their DNA, take only 12 to 28 months. This extended dependency period for humans—what some have referred to as the long childhood—allows each human being time to learn the complexities of culture. This suggests that biology and social processes work together.

Normal human development involves learning to sit, crawl, stand, walk, think, talk, and participate in social interactions. Ideally, the long period of dependence allows children the opportunity to learn necessary skills, knowledge, and social roles through affectionate and tolerant interaction with people who care about them. Yet, what happens if children are deprived of adequate care or even human contact? The following section illustrates the importance of socialization by showing the effect of deprivation and isolation on normal socialization.

Isolated and Abused Children

Anna and Isabelle experienced extreme isolation in early childhood, cut off from other humans. In case studies comparing the two girls, Kingsley Davis (1947) found that even minimal human contact made some difference in their socialization. Both “illegitimate” girls were kept locked up by relatives who wanted to keep their existence a secret. Both were discovered at about age six and moved to institutions where they received intensive training. Yet, the cases were different in one significant respect: Prior to her discovery by those outside her immediate family, Anna experienced virtually no human contact. She saw other individuals only when they left food for her. Isabelle lived in a darkened room with her deaf-mute mother, who provided some human contact. Anna could not sit, walk, or talk and learned little in the special school in which she was placed. When she died from jaundice at age 11, she had learned the language and skills of a two- or three-year-old. Isabelle, on the other hand, progressed. She learned to talk and played with her peers. After two years, she reached an intellectual level approaching normal for her age but remained about two years behind her classmates in performance levels (Davis 1940, 1947).

Cases of children who come from war-torn countries (Povik 1994), live in orphanages, or are neglected or abused illustrate less extreme isolation. Although not totally isolated, these children also experience problems and disruptions in the socialization process. These neglected children's situations have been referred to as abusive, violent, and dead-end environments that are socially toxic because of their harmful developmental consequences for children.

What is the message? These cases illustrate the devastating effects of isolation, neglect, and abuse early in life on normal socialization. Humans need more from their environments than food and shelter. They need positive contact, a sense of belonging, affection, safety, and someone to teach them knowledge and skills. This is children's socialization into the world through which they develop a self. Before we examine the development of the self in depth, however, we consider the complexity of socialization in the multilayered social world.

Socialization and the Social World

Sociologists are interested in how individuals become members of their society and learn the culture to which they belong. Through the socialization process, individuals learn what is expected in their society. At the micro level, most parents teach children proper behaviors to be successful in life, and peers influence children to “fit in” and have fun. Individual development and behavior occur in social settings. Interaction theory, focusing on the micro level, forms the basis of this chapter, as you will see.

At the meso level, religious denominations espouse their versions of the Truth, and schools teach the knowledge
and skills necessary for functioning in society. At the nationwide macro level, television ads encourage viewers to buy products that will make them better and happier people. From interactions with our significant others to dealing with government bureaucracy, most activities are part of the socialization experience that teaches us how to function in our society. Keep in mind that socialization is a lifelong process. Even your grandparents are learning how to live at their stage of life.

The social world model at the start of the chapter illustrates the levels of analysis in the social world. The process of socialization takes place at each level, linking the parts. Small micro-level groups include families, peer groups (who are roughly equal in some status within the society, such as age or occupation), and voluntary groups such as civic clubs. Examples of meso-level institutions are educational and political systems, while an important macro-level unit is the federal government. All of these have a stake in how we are socialized because they all need trained and loyal group members to survive. Organizations need citizens who have been socialized to devote time, energy, and resources that these groups need to survive and meet their goals. Lack of adequate socialization increases the likelihood of individuals becoming misfits or social deviants.

Most perspectives on socialization focus on the micro level, as we shall see when we explore development of the self. Meso- and macro-level theories add to our understanding of how socialization prepares individuals for their roles in the larger social world. For example, structural-functionalist perspectives of socialization tend to see different levels of the social world operating to support each other. According to this perspective, education in many Western societies reinforces individualism and an achievement ethic. Families often organize holidays around patriotic themes, such as a national independence day, or around religious celebrations. These values are compatible with preparing individuals to support national political and economic systems.

Socialization can also be understood from the conflict perspective, with the linkages between various parts of the social world based on competition with or even direct opposition to another part. For example, demands from organizations for our resources (time, money, and energy devoted to the Little League, the Rotary club, and library associations) may leave nothing to give to our religious communities or even our families, setting up a conflict. Each organization and unit competes to gain our loyalty in order to claim some of our resources.

At the meso level, the purposes and values of organizations or institutions are sometimes in direct contrast with one another or are in conflict with the messages at other levels of the social system. Businesses and educational institutions try to socialize their workers and students to be serious, hardworking, sober, and conscientious, with lifestyles focused on the future. By contrast, many fraternal organizations and barroom microcultures favor lifestyles that celebrate drinking, sex, and living for the moment. This creates conflicting values in the socialization process.

Conflict can occur in the global community as well. For example, religious groups often socialize their members to identify with humanity as a whole (“the family of God”). However, in some cases, nations do not want their citizens socialized to identify with those beyond their borders. If religion teaches that all people are “brothers and sisters” and if religious people object to killing, the nation may have trouble mobilizing its people to arms when the leaders call for war.

Conflict theorists believe that those who have power and privilege use socialization to manipulate individuals in the social world to support the power structure and the self-interests of the elite. Although they may not realize it, most individuals have little power to control and decide their futures.

Each theoretical explanation has merit for explaining some situations. Whether we stress harmony in the socialization process or conflict rooted in power differences, the development of a sense of self through the process of socialization is an ongoing, lifelong process. Having considered the multiple levels of analysis and the issues that make socialization complicated, let us focus specifically on the micro level: Where does the sense of self originate?

Thinking Sociologically

Although the socialization process occurs primarily at the micro level, it is influenced by events at each level of analysis shown in the social world model. Give examples of family, community, subcultural, national, or global events that might have influenced how you were socialized or that might influence how you would socialize your child.

Development of the Self: Micro-Level Analysis

The main product of the socialization process is the self. Fundamentally, self refers to the perceptions we have of who we are. Throughout the socialization process, our self is derived from our perceptions of the way others are responding to us. The development of the self allows individuals to interact with other people and to learn to function at each level of the social world.

Humans are not born with a sense of self. It develops gradually, beginning in infancy and continuing throughout adulthood. Selfhood emerges through interaction with others. Individual biology, culture, and social experiences all
play a part in shaping the self. The hereditary blueprint each person brings into the world provides broad biological outlines, including particular physical attributes, temperament, and a maturational schedule. However, nature is shaped by nurture. Each person is also born into a family that lives within a particular culture. This hereditary blueprint, in interaction with family and culture, helps create each unique person, different from any other person yet sharing the types of interactions by which the self is formed.

Most sociologists, although not all (Irvine 2004), believe that we humans are distinct from other animals in our ability to develop a self and to be aware of ourselves as individuals or objects. Consider how we refer to ourselves in the first person—I am hungry, I feel foolish, I am having fun, I am good at basketball. We have a conception of who we are, how we relate to others, and how we differ from and are separate from others in our abilities and limitations. We have an awareness of the characteristics, values, feelings, and attitudes that give us our unique sense of self (James [1890] 1934; Mead [1934] 1962).

The Looking-Glass Self and Role-Taking

The theoretical tradition of symbolic interaction offers important insights into how individuals develop the self. Charles H. Cooley ([1909] 1983) believed the self is a social product, shaped by interactions with others from the time of birth. He likened interaction processes to looking in a mirror wherein each person reflects an image of the other.

Each to each a looking-glass
Reflects the other that doth pass.

(Cooley [1909] 1983:184)

For Cooley ([1909] 1983), the looking-glass self is a reflective process based on our interpretations of the reactions of others. In this process, Cooley believed that there are three principal elements, shown in Figure 4.1. We experience feelings such as pride or shame based on this imagined judgment and respond based on our interpretation. Moreover, throughout this process, we actively try to manipulate other people’s view of us to serve our needs and interests. This is one of the many ways we learn to be boys or girls—the image that is reflected back to us lets us know whether we have behaved in ways that are socially acceptable according to gender expectations. The issue of gender socialization in particular will be discussed in Chapter 9. Of course, this does not mean our interpretation of the other person’s response is correct, but our interpretation does determine how we respond.

Our self is influenced by the many “others” with whom we interact, and each of our interpretations of their reactions feeds into our self-concept. Recall that the isolated children failed to develop this sense of self precisely because they lacked interaction with others.

Taking the looking-glass self idea a step further, George Herbert Mead ([1934] 1962) explained that individuals take others into account by imagining themselves in the position of that other, a process called role-taking. When children play mommy and daddy, doctor and patient, or firefighter, they are imagining themselves in another’s shoes. Role-taking allows humans to view themselves from the standpoint of others. This requires mentally stepping out of our own experience to imagine how others experience and view the social world. Through role-taking, we begin to see who we are from the standpoint of others. In short, role-taking allows humans to view themselves as objects, as though they are looking at themselves from outside their bodies. For Mead, role-taking is prerequisite for the development of sense of self.

Mead ([1934] 1962) also argued that role-taking is possible because humans have a unique ability to use and respond to symbols. Symbols, discussed in Chapter 3 on culture, are human creations such as language and gestures.
that are used to represent objects or actions; they carry specific meaning for members of a culture. Symbols such as language allow us to give names to objects in the environment and to infuse those objects with meanings. Once the person learns to symbolically recognize objects in the environment, the self can be seen as one of those objects. In the most rudimentary sense, this starts with possessing a name that allows us to see our self as separate from other objects. Note that the connection of symbol and object is arbitrary, such as the name Michelle Obama and a specific human being. When we say that name, most listeners immediately think of the same person: First Lady of the United States, mother of two daughters, concerned with childhood obesity issues and poor diets. Using symbols is unique to humans. In the process of symbolic interaction, we take the actions of others and ourselves into account. Individuals may blame, encourage, praise, punish, or reward themselves. An example would be a basketball player missing the basket because the shot was poorly executed and thinking, “What did I do to miss that shot? I’m better than that!” A core idea is that the self has agency—it is an initiator of action and a maker of meaning, not just a passive responder to external forces.

The next "Sociology in Your Social World" on page 100 illustrates the looking-glass self process and the way role-taking affects selfhood for African American males.

**Thinking Sociologically**

First, read the essay on the following page. Brent Staples goes out of his way to assure others that he is harmless. What might be some other responses to this experience of having others assume one is dangerous and untrustworthy? How might one's sense of self be influenced by these responses of others? How are the looking-glass self and role-taking at work in this scenario?

**Parts of the Self**

According to the symbolic interaction perspective, the self is composed of two distinct but related parts—dynamic parts in interplay with one another (Mead [1934] 1962). The most basic element of the self is what George Herbert Mead refers to as the I, the spontaneous, unpredictable, impulsive, and largely unorganized aspect of the self. These spontaneous, undirected impulses of the I initiate or give propulsion to behavior without considering the possible social consequences. We can see this at work in the “I want it now” behavior of a newborn baby or even a toddler. Cookie Monster on the children’s television program Sesame Street illustrates the I in every child, gobbling cookies at every chance. The I continues as part of the self throughout life, tempered by the social expectations that surround individuals. In stages, humans become increasingly influenced by interactions with others who instill society’s rules. Children develop the ability to see the self as others see them and critique the behavior of the I. Mead ([1934] 1962) called this reflective capacity of the self the Me. The Me has learned the rules of society through socialization and interaction, and it controls the I and its desires. Just as the I initiates the act, the Me gives direction to the act. In a sense, the Me channels the impulses of the I in an acceptable manner according to societal rules and restraints yet meets the needs of the I as best it can. When we stop ourselves just before saying something and think to ourselves, “I’d better not say that,” it is our Me monitoring and controlling the I. Notice that the Me requires the ability to take the role of the other, to anticipate the other’s reaction.

**Stages in the Development of the Self**

The process of developing a social self occurs gradually and in stages. Mead ([1934] 1962) identified three critical stages: the imitation stage, the play stage, and the game stage, each...
Sociology in Your Social World

Black Men and Public Space

By Brent Staples

Many stereotypes—rigid images of members of a particular group—surround the young African American male in the United States. How these images influence these young men and their social world is the subject of this feature. Think about the human cost of stereotypes and their effect on the socialization process as you read the following essay. If your sense of self is profoundly influenced by the ways others respond to you, how might the identity of a young African American boy be affected by public images of black males?

My first victim was a woman—white, well dressed, probably in her early 20s. I came upon her late one evening on a deserted street in Hyde Park, a relatively affluent neighborhood in an otherwise mean, impoverished section of Chicago. As I swung onto the avenue behind her . . . she cast back a worried glance. To her, the youngish black man—broad, six feet, two inches tall; with a beard and billowing hair; both hands shoved into the pockets of a bulky military jacket—seemed menacingly close. After a few more quick glimpses, she picked up her pace and was running in earnest. Within seconds, she disappeared into a cross street.

That was more than a decade ago. I was 22 years old, a graduate student newly arrived at the University of Chicago. It was in the echo of that terrified woman’s footsteps that I first began to know the unwieldy inheritance I’d come into. . . . It was clear that she thought herself the quarry of a mugger, a rapist, or worse. Suffering a bout of insomnia, however, I was stalking sleep, not defenselessly wayfarers. . . . I was surprised, embarrassed, and dismayed all at once. Her flight . . . made it clear that I was indistinguishable from the muggers who occasionally seeped into the area from the surrounding ghetto. That first encounter, and those that followed, signaled that a vast, unnerving gulf lay between nighttime pedestrians—particularly women—and me. And I soon gathered that being perceived as dangerous is a hazard in itself. I only needed to turn a corner into a dicey situation; crowd some frightened, armed person in a foyer somewhere; or make an errant move after being pulled over by a policeman. Where fear and weapons meet—and they often do in urban America—there is always the possibility of death.

In that first year, my first away from my hometown, I was to become thoroughly familiar with the language of fear. At dark, shadowy intersections, I could cross in front of a car stopped at a traffic light and elicit the thunk, thunk, thunk of the driver—black, white, male, or female—hammering down the door locks. On less-traveled streets after dark, I grew accustomed to but never comfortable with people crossing to the other side of the street rather than pass me. Then there was the standard unpleasantness with policemen, doormen, bouncers, cabdrivers, and those whose business it is to screen out troublesome individuals before there is any nastiness.

After dark, on the warren-like streets of Brooklyn where I live, I often see women who fear the worst from me. They seem to have set their faces on neutral, and with their purse straps strung across their chests bandolier style, they forge ahead as though bracing themselves against being tackled. I understand, of course, that . . . women are particularly vulnerable to street violence and young black males are drastically overrepresented among the perpetrators of that violence. Yet these truths are no solace against the kind of alienation that comes of being ever the suspect. . . .

Over the years, I learned to smother the rage I felt at so often being taken for a criminal. Not to do so would surely have led to madness. I now take precautions to make myself less threatening. I move about with care, particularly late in the evening. I give a wide berth to nervous people on the subway platforms during the wee hours. . . . I have been calm and extremely congenial on those rare occasions when I’ve been pulled over by the police.

And on late-evening constitutionals, I employ what have proved to be excellent tension-reducing measures: I whistle melodies from Beethoven and Vivaldi and the more popular classical composers. Even steely New Yorkers hunching toward nighttime destinations seem to relax, and occasionally they even join in the tune. Virtually everybody seems to sense that a mugger wouldn’t be warbling bright, sunny selections from Vivaldi’s Four Seasons. It is my equivalent of the cowbell that hikers wear when they know they are in bear country.

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of which requires the unique human ability to engage in role-taking. In the imitation stage, the child under three years old is preparing for role-taking by observing others and imitating their behaviors, sounds, and gestures.

The play stage involves a kind of play-acting in which the child is actually “playing at” a role. Listen to children who are three to five years old play together. You will notice that they spend most of their time telling each other what to do. One of them will say something like “You be the mommy, and I can be the daddy, and Julie, you be the dog. Now you say, ‘Good morning, Dear,’ and I’ll say, ‘How did you sleep?’ and Julie, you scratch at the door like you want to go out.” They will talk about their little skit for 15 minutes and then enact it, with the actual enactment taking perhaps one minute. Small children mimic or imitate role-taking based on what they have seen.

A child who is playing mommy or daddy with a doll is playing at taking the role of parent. The child is directing activity toward the doll in a manner imitative of how the parents direct activity toward the child. The child often does not know what to do when playing the role of a parent “going off to work” because children can play only roles they have seen or are familiar with. They do not know what the absent parent does at work. The point is that this “play” is actually extremely important “work” for children because they need to observe and imitate the relationships between roles to form the adult self (Handel, Cahill, and Elkin 2007).

Society and its rules are initially represented by significant others—parents, guardians, relatives, or siblings whose primary and sustained interactions with the child are especially influential. That is why much of the play stage involves role-taking based on these significant people in the child’s life. The child does not yet understand the complex relations and multiple role players in the social world outside the immediate family. Children may have a sense of how Mommy or Daddy sees them, but children are not yet able to comprehend how they are seen by the larger social world. Lack of role-taking ability is apparent when children say inappropriate things such as “Why are you so fat?”

In the game stage, the child learns to take the role of multiple others concurrently. Have you ever watched a team of young children play T-ball (a pre–Little League baseball game in which the children hit the ball from an upright rubber device that holds the ball), or have you observed a soccer league made up of six-year-olds? If so, you have seen Mead’s (1934; 1962) point illustrated vividly. In soccer (or football), five- or six-year-old children will not play their positions despite constant urging and cajoling by coaches. They all run after the ball, with little sense of their interdependent positions. Likewise, a child in a game of T-ball may pick up a ball that has been hit, turn to the coach, and say, “Now what do I do with it?” Most still do not quite grasp throwing it to first base, and the first-base player may actually have left the base to run for the ball. It can be hilarious for everyone except the coach, as a hit that goes seven feet turns into a home run because everyone is scrambling for the ball.

When the children enter the game stage at about age seven or eight, they will be developmentally able to play the roles of various positions and enjoy a complex game. Each child learns what is expected and the interdependence of roles because she or he is then able to respond to the expectations of several people simultaneously (Hewitt 2007; Meltzer 1978). This allows the individual to coordinate his or her activity with others.

In moving from the play stage to the game stage, children’s worlds expand from family and day care to neighborhood playmates, school, and other organizations. This process gradually builds up a composite of societal
Very young children who play soccer do not understand the role requirements of games. They all—including the goalie—want to chase after the ball. Learning to play positions is a critical step in socialization, for it requires a higher level of role-taking than children can do at the play stage.

expectations—what Mead ([1934] 1962) refers to as the **generalized other**. The child learns to internalize the expectations of society—the generalized other—over and above the expectations of any “significant others.” Behavior comes to be governed by abstract rules (“no running outside of the baseline” or “no touching the soccer ball with your hands unless you are the goalie”) rather than guidance from and emotional ties to a “significant other.” Children become capable of moving into new social arenas such as school, organized sports, and (eventually) the workplace to function with others in both routine and novel interactions. Individuals are active in shaping their social contexts, the self, and the choices they make about the future.

As we grow, we identify with new in-groups such as a neighborhood, a college sorority, or the military. We learn new ideas and expand our understanding. Some individuals ultimately come to think of themselves as part of the global human community. Thus, for many individuals, the social world expands through socialization. However, some individuals never develop this expanded worldview, remaining narrowly confined and drawing lines between themselves and others who are different. Such narrow boundaries often result in prejudice against others.

Two major approaches to symbolic interaction developed at different universities: the Universities of Chicago and Iowa. Much of the discussion thus far has focused on the Chicago School of symbolic interactionism. That perspective emphasizes the role of the *I* and focuses on the active agency of individuals in their own development. The Iowa School of symbolic interactionism places more emphasis on the *Me*—on the role of others and the external social environment in shaping us (Carrothers and Benson 2003).

The Iowa School stresses that our identities are linked to our environments: institutions, organizations, and nations. Because of that, we have a vested interest in the stability of the society and the survival of those organizations that mean a lot to us—whether it is the college where we are a student, the Greek house that we join, the faith community with which we affiliate, or the nation of which we are a citizen. We will voluntarily give up our resources—time, energy, money, or even our lives—to preserve our beliefs, way of life, institutions, or nation. Thus, the self and its connection with meso-level structures such as organizations to which we belong are linked (Kuhn 1964; Stryker 1980, 2000; Stryker and Stratham 1985; Turner 2003).

**Thinking Sociologically**

Who are you? Write down 15 or 20 roles or attributes that describe who you are. How many of these items are characteristics associated with the *Me*—nouns such as *son, mother, student, or employee*? Which of the items are traits or attributes—adjectives such as *shy, sensitive, lonely, selfish, or vulnerable*? How do you think each of these was learned or incorporated into your conception of your *self*?

**Socialization Throughout the Life Cycle**

Markers in many societies point to rites of passage that mark movement from one stage to the next in the socialization process: birth; naming ceremonies or christenings; starting school at age five or six; rites of passage to mark puberty; obtaining a driver’s license; becoming eligible for military draft; being able to vote and drink alcohol; retirement. Most social scientists emphasize the importance of *rites of passage*—celebrations or public recognitions when individuals shift from one status to another. The importance of this shift resides in how others come to perceive the individual differently, the different expectations that others hold for the person, and changes in how the person sees himself or herself.

Socialization is a lifelong process with many small and large passages. Infants begin the socialization process at birth. In childhood, one rite of passage is a child’s first day at school—entrance into a meso-level institution. This turning point marks a child’s entry into the larger world. The
standards of performance are now defined by the child's teachers, peers, friends, and others outside the home. Adolescence is an important stage in Western industrial and postindustrial societies, but this stage is far from universal. Indeed, it is largely an invention of complex societies over the past two centuries, characterized by extensive periods of formal education and dependency on parents (Papalia, Olds, and Feldman 2006). Adolescence is, in a sense, a structurally produced mass identity crisis because Western societies lack clear rites of passage for adolescents. Teens come to view themselves as a separate and distinct group with their own culture, slang vocabulary, clothing styles, and opinions about appropriate sexual behavior and forms of recreation.

Most of our adult years are spent in work and home life, including marriage and parenting roles. It is not surprising, then, that graduation from one's final alma mater (whether it be high school, college, or graduate school), marriage, and acceptance of one's first full-time job are rites of passage into adulthood in modern societies. Even the retired and elderly members of society are constantly undergoing socialization and resocialization in the process of developing their sense of self. The type of society influences the socialization experience of the elderly and how they carry out their roles, as well as their status in society. Consider the changes that have taken place in the lifetimes of those born before 1945. They were born “before television, before polio shots, frozen foods, Xerox, plastic, contact lenses, Frisbees and the Pill . . . before credit cards, split atoms, laser beams and ball point pens; before pantyhose, dishwashers, clothes dryers, electric blankets, air conditioners . . . .” and many other familiar “necessities” of today (Grandpa Junior 2006). There are increasing numbers of people in the elder category. The average life expectancy in 1929 was only 57 years. Today, it is 78.1 years, with 50 countries having higher average life expectancies than the United States (Landau 2009).

Thinking Sociologically

What are the rites of passage from adolescence into adulthood in your country? Does each stage carry clear roles and responsibilities? If not, does this have consequences that create problems? Find someone who has grown up in a different culture and ask her or him about rites of passage from adolescence to adulthood. How are the patterns similar to or different from your own?

The elderly are vitally important to the ongoing group in more settled agricultural societies. They are the founts of wisdom and carry group knowledge, experiences, and traditions that are valued in societies where little change takes place. In industrial and postindustrial countries, the number of elderly is growing rapidly as medical science keeps people alive longer, diets improve, and diseases are brought under control. Yet, in modern systems, social participation by the elderly often drops after retirement. Retirement is a rite of passage to a new status, like that of marriage or parenthood, for which there is little preparation. As a result, retired people sometimes feel a sense of uselessness when they abruptly lose their occupational status. Yet, retirees in Western societies generally have 20 or more years of life yet to live. Many retirees develop hobbies, enjoy sports, or have new jobs they can pursue.

Dying is the final stage of life (Kübler-Ross 1997). Death holds different meanings in different cultures: passing into another life, a time of judgment, a waiting for rebirth, or a void and nothingness. In some religious groups, people work hard or do good deeds because they believe they will be rewarded in an afterlife or with rebirth to a better status in the next life on earth. Thus, beliefs about the meaning of death can affect how people live their lives and how they cope with dying and death.

Each stage of the life cycle involves socialization into new roles in the social world. Many social scientists have studied these developmental stages and contributed insights.
into what happens at each stage (Clausen 1986; Erikson 1950; Freud [1923] 1960; Gilligan 1982; Handel et al. 2007; Kohlberg 1971; Papalia et al. 2006; Piaget 1989). Although examination of this topic is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is important to know that developmental theorists have detailed stages in the growth process.

Death ends the lifelong process of socialization, a process of learning social rules and roles and adjusting to them. When the individual is gone, society continues. New members are born, are socialized into the social world, pass through roles once held by others, and eventually give up those roles to younger members. Cultures provide guidelines for each new generation to follow, and except for the changes each generation brings to the society, the social world perpetuates itself and outlives the individuals who populate it.

The Process of Resocialization

If you have experienced life in the military, a boarding school, a convent, a mental facility, or a prison or had a major transition in your life such as a divorce or the death of a spouse or child, you have experienced resocialization. Resocialization is the process of shedding one or more positions and taking on others. It involves changing from established patterns learned earlier in life to new ones suitable to the newly acquired status (Goffman 1961). Resocialization may take place in a total institution in which a group of people is bureaucratically processed, physically isolated from the outside world, and scheduled for all activities. These include prisons, mental hospitals, monasteries, concentration camps, boarding schools, and military barracks. Bureaucratic regimentation and the manipulation of residents for the convenience of the staff are part of the routine (Goffman 1961).

We often associate resocialization with major changes in adult life—divorce, retirement, and widowhood. One must adjust to raising children alone, living alone, loneliness, and possible financial problems. One divorcée of three years told the authors: “There are many things to commend the single life, but I still have not adjusted to eating alone and cooking for myself. But worse than that are Sunday afternoons. That is the loneliest time.”

Sometimes resocialization describes individuals’ attempts to adjust to new statuses and roles, such as widowhood. In other cases, individuals are forced into resocialization to correct or reform behaviors that are defined as undesirable or deviant. Prison rehabilitation programs provide one example. However, research suggests the difficulty in resocializing prisoners is rooted in the nature of the prison environment itself. Prisons are often coercive and violent environments, which may not provide the social supports necessary for bringing about change in a person’s attitudes and behaviors.
Although resocialization is the goal of self-help groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Gamblers Anonymous, Parents Anonymous, drug rehabilitation groups, and weight-loss groups, relapse is a common problem among participants. These groups aim to substitute new behaviors and norms for old undesirable ones, but the process of undoing socialization and achieving resocialization is difficult.

There are multiple individuals, groups, and institutions involved in the socialization process. These socialization forces are referred to as agents of socialization.

Agents of Socialization: The Micro-Meso Connection

Agents of socialization are the transmitters of culture—the people, organizations, and institutions that teach us how to thrive in our social world. Agents are the mechanism by which the self learns the values, beliefs, and behaviors of the culture. Agents of socialization help new members find their place, just as they prepare older members for new responsibilities in society. At the micro level, one’s family, one’s peer group, and local groups and organizations help people know what is expected of them. At the meso level, formal sources of learning—education, religion, politics, economics, and health—and other informal sources of learning such as the media and books are all agents that contribute to socialization. They transmit information to children and to adults throughout people’s lives.

Thinking Sociologically

As you read this section, make a list of the socializing agents discussed in these pages. Indicate two or three central messages each agent of socialization tries to instill in people. Consider which agents are micro, meso, or macro agents. Are there different kinds of messages at each level? Do any of them conflict? If so, why, and what problems are caused?

In early childhood, the family acts as the primary agent of socialization, passing on messages about respect for property, authority, and neatness, for example (Handel et al. 2007). Peer groups are also important, especially during the teenage years. Some writers even argue that the peer group is most important in the socialization process of children and teens (Aseltine 1995; Harris 2009). Each agent has its own functions or purposes and is important at different stages of the life cycle, but meso-level institutions play a more active role as one matures. For example, schools and religious bodies become more involved in socialization as children become six years old compared to when they were preschool age. The “Sociology in Your Social World” on page 100 discusses socialization in schools by exploring an important and widely cited research project—the issue of how schools reinforce notions of gender.

Lessons from one agent of socialization generally complement those of other agents. Parents work at home to support what school and religion teach. However, at times agents provide conflicting lessons. For example, family and faith communities often give teens messages that conflict with those of peer groups regarding sexual activity and drug use. This is an instance of mixed messages given by formal and informal agents.

For formal agents, socialization is the stated goal. Formal agents usually have some official or legal responsibility for instructing individuals. A primary goal of families is to teach children to speak and to learn proper behavior. In addition, schoolteachers educate by giving formal instruction, and religious training provides moral instruction. (These formal agents of socialization will be discussed in Chapters 10, 11, and 12.)

Informal agents do not have the express purpose of socialization, but they function as unofficial forces that shape values, beliefs, and behaviors. For example, the media, books, the Internet, and advertisements bring us
Pause for a moment as you pass a school yard, and observe the children at play. Children's behavior on the school playground translates into a powerful agent of gender socialization in a world that is very complex. Consider the evidence reported in the ethnographic study of Barrie Thorne, recounted in her award-winning book, *Gender Play* (1993).

Many people assume that gender differences are natural and that we are “born that way.” By contrast, Thorne provides evidence that gender differences are social constructions, influenced by the setting, the players involved in the situation, and the control people have over the situation.

As an astute observer and researcher, Thorne suspected that girls and boys have complex relations that play out in the classroom and school yard. She chose the playground as the focus of her observation of the separate worlds of girls and boys. As her research strategy, she points out that “when adults seek to learn about and from children, the challenge is to take the closely familiar and to render it strange” (Thorne 1993:12). She is suggesting that we need to look at well-known everyday patterns from a fresh point of view.

Through systematic participant observation she found that children and adults play an active role in defining and shaping gender expectations through the collective practices of forming lines, choosing seats, teasing, gossiping, and participating in selected activities.

Thorne used two schools for her research and entered the world of the children, sometimes sitting apart on the playground taking notes, sometimes participating in their activities such as eating and talking in the lunchroom.

In each setting, she recorded her observations and experiences. For example, she noted what children call themselves and how they think of themselves.

She was intrigued by the reference to the opposite sex—a term that stresses difference and opposition rather than similarity and a sense of “we.” Thorne was struck by the active meaning construction of children as they gained a notion of “normal” gender behavior. The real focus of her work is in taking seriously how children themselves make sense of sex differences—and how they sometimes ignore any difference as irrelevant to their activities.

Previous studies concluded that boys tend to interact in larger, more age-heterogeneous groups and in more rough-and-tumble play and physical fighting. Thorne also found that boys’ play involves a much larger portion of the playground, and their play space was generally farther from the building, making them less subject to monitoring and sanctioning. In addition, boys would often run “sneak invasions” into the girls’ space to take things belonging to the girls. Many boys felt they had a right to the geographical space that was occupied by females. Girls played close to the buildings in much smaller areas and rarely ventured into the boys’ area.

Girls’ play tended to be characterized by cooperation and turn-taking. They had more intense and exclusive friendships, which took shape around keeping and telling secrets, shifting alliances, and indirect ways of expressing disagreement. Instead of direct commands, girls more often used words like *let’s* or *we gotta*. However, Thorne found that these notions of “separate girls’ and boys’ worlds” used in most previous studies miss the subtleties in the situation—race, class, and other factors.

Thorne’s work alerts us to the complexity of the gender socialization process, helping us see the extent to which children are active agents who are creating their own definitions of social relations, not just short automatons who enact adult notions of what gender means.

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**Thinking Sociologically**

Recall your own playground days or watch a sibling or child on the playground. What do your observations tell you about the role of play in gender socialization?

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All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.
This distinction between formal, intentional socialization and informal socialization has important implications for the kinds of messages that are presented and for how such messages are received.

**Micro-Level Socialization: Families as Formal Agents**

One way in which families teach children what is right and wrong is through rewards and punishments, called *sanctions*. Children who steal cookies from the cookie jar may receive a verbal reprimand or a slap on the hand, be sent to their rooms, have “time out,” or receive a beating, depending on differences in child-rearing practices. These are examples of negative sanctions. Conversely, children may be rewarded for good behavior with a smile, praise, a cookie, or a special event. These are examples of positive sanctions. The number and types of sanctions dispensed in the family shape the socialization process, including development of the self and the perceptions we have of who we are. Note that family influence varies from one culture to another.

In Japan, the mother is the key agent in the process of turning a newborn into a member of the group, passing on the strong group standards and expectations of family, neighbors, community, and society through the use of language with emotional meaning (Hendry 1987; Holloway 2001). The interaction of family and formal education in Japan is explored in more detail in the “Sociology Around the World” on page 108.

In the United States, most parents value friendliness, cooperation, orientation toward achievement, social competence, responsibility, and independence as qualities their children should learn, in contrast to values of conformity and fitting into the group espoused in Japan. However, subcultural values and socialization practices may differ within the diverse groups in the U.S. population. Conceptions of what makes a “good person” or a “good citizen” and different goals of socialization bring about differences in the process of socialization around the world.

In addition, the number of children in a family and the placement of each child in the family structure can influence the unique socialization experience of the child. In large families, parents typically have less time with each additional child. Where the child falls in the hierarchy of siblings can also influence the development of the self. In fact, birth order is a very strong predictor of social attitudes—perhaps more so than race, class, or gender—according to some studies (Benokraitis 2008; Freese et al. 1999), and firstborns are typically the highest achievers (“First Born Children” 2008; Paulhus, Trapnell, and Chen 1999). Younger children may be socialized by older siblings as much as by parents, and older siblings often serve as models that younger children want to emulate.

**Meso-Level Socialization: Social Class**

Our educational level, our occupation, the house we live in, what we choose to do in our leisure time, the foods we eat, and what we believe in terms of religion and politics are just a few aspects of our lives that are affected by socialization. Applying what we know from sociological research, the evidence strongly suggests that socialization varies by *social class*, or the wealth, power, and prestige rankings that individuals hold in society (Ellison, Bartkowski, and Segal 1996; Pearce 2009). Meso-level patterns of distribution of resources affect who we become. For example, upper-middle-class and middle-class parents in the United States usually have above-average education and managerial or professional jobs. They tend to pass on to their children skills and values necessary to succeed in this social class subculture. Autonomy, creativity, self-direction (the ability to make decisions and take initiative), responsibility, curiosity, and consideration of others are especially important for...
Sociology Around the World

Socialization in Japan: The Family and Early Schooling

By Wendy Ng

Each of our families prepares us through the socialization process for the culture we are entering. How families carry out this process differs around the world, just as the cultures for which they are preparing their children differ. Here we consider meso-level family and early schooling in Japanese socialization.

The family is one of the most important socializing influences in Japan. The basis of the family unit in Japan is called the ie (pronounced ee-ay). Traditionally, it is made up of blood relatives who reside in the same household, as well as ancestors and descendents not yet born. Thus, family in Japan goes beyond those who belong to the immediate nuclear grouping and includes a broader array of individuals. Compared with the past, the modern ie in Japan relies more on the nuclear and living extended family and serves as the major reference group that socializes individuals within the family. Thus, family members within the ie are responsible for teaching individuals their family roles, values, and norms within the culture.

A unique feature of interdependence that is found within the family structure is that of amae (ah-may), which roughly translated means “passive love” but is often referred to as an emotional bond usually held between mother and child. Through this relationship, children are socialized to understand that they are an important part of the family, and they also learn that parents are to be respected and obeyed as the adults within the family. Although this appears hierarchical, the emotional bond of amae sets up a relationship of interdependency between child and parent for their lifetime. As children grow into adulthood, they will take care of their parents in the way that they were taken care of as children. This bond of loyalty between parent and child within the family structure is translated into other social structures outside the family. For example, in a business organization, there is a similar expectation of group loyalty.

In terms of early childhood socialization, Japanese children learn the distinction between two related yet distinct concepts: uchi and soto. Roughly translated these mean “inside” and “outside” and can apply to material distinctions of clean and unclean spaces. In behavior, this means taking one’s shoes off outside the house because the inside is clean and the outside is unclean. In Japanese households, the bathroom has similar clean and unclean designations. The bath is “clean,” and the toilet, used to dispose of bodily wastes, is “unclean.”

Thus, one would never wear the same shoes or slippers in the toilet room as the bathroom because that would be mixing clean and unclean elements.

Within the family, immediate members are “insiders,” and other people are “outsiders.” Children learn that the family is a safe and secure environment where the emphasis is on harmony among the various family members. Interactions between individuals stress cooperation, and interpersonal disputes are avoided. If a disagreement happens, children are taught to apologize to one another. Reciprocity is yet another behavior that is emphasized within the family. Children are taught to put themselves in the role of the other person and to think of the consequences of their behavior before acting out. This type of role behavior suggests that harmony between and among family members is important and sets the foundation for the child’s educational socialization.

Whereas the family serves as the central socializing force when children are very young, as they grow, the educational system continues to socialize children through group interaction and learning. When children enter kindergarten they become familiar with participating in a social group with peers. The Japanese kindergarten system emphasizes group equality among children and thus socializes children to be loyal to their classmates and group. Other children now form their new uchi or “inside” associations and friendships. The emphasis on group over individual identities is accomplished through wearing identical uniforms or smocks, having similar educational tools for all students, and having children take turns in different duties in the classroom. For example, the responsibility of passing out paper in the classroom or food at lunchtime is rotated among all the children in the classroom. Thus, cooperation and group participation become an important defining feature of kindergarten socialization.

At first glance, the emphasis on equality among individuals in the kindergarten classroom setting might seem to conflict with the emphasis on hierarchical authority present in much of Japanese society. In fact, the emphasis on group socializing helps encourage a sense of belonging and group identity that works well within hierarchical authority structures. By learning these behaviors at a young age, the children learn that they are individuals within a larger group and that their actions reflect not only on themselves but also on their family, their school, or whatever social group they belong to as adults.
middle-class success (Kohn 1989). If the child misbehaves, for example, middle-class parents typically analyze the child’s reasons for misbehaving, and punishment is related to these reasons. Sanctions often involve instilling guilt and denying privileges.

Working-class parents tend to pass on to children their cultural values of respect for authority and conformity to rules, lessons that will be useful if the children also have blue-collar jobs (Kohn 1989). Immediate punishment with no questions asked if a rule is violated functions to prepare children for positions in which obedience to rules is important to success. They are expected to be neat, clean, well-mannered, honest, and obedient students (MacLeod 2008). Socialization experiences for boys and girls are often different, following traditional gender-role expectations. Moreover, these differences in behavior across social classes and parenting styles are apparent cross-culturally as well (Leung, Lau, and Lam 1998).

What conclusions can we draw from these studies? Members of each class are socializing their children to be successful in their social class and to meet expectations for adults of that class. Schools, like families, participate in this process. Although the extent to which schools create or limit opportunities for class mobility is debated, what is clear is that children’s social class position on entering school has an effect on the socialization experiences they have in school (Ballantine and Hammack 2012). Families and schools socialize children to adapt to the settings in which they grow up and are likely to live.

Social class, however, is only one of many influencing agents. As we saw in Black Men and Public Space on page 100, race and ethnicity are very important factors in socialization, and the influence of gender is enormous. Gender socialization will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 9, but we note here that race, class, and gender act as structural constraints on some members of the population. People who are not privileged receive different messages about who they are and how they should behave. Some of us receive messages about being privileged in certain respects and perceive constraining messages in others, and that is why it is important to recognize the interplay of the variables in people’s lives.

**Informal Agents of Socialization: Electronic Media**

Television and computers are important informal agents of socialization. In developed countries, there is scarcely a home without a television set, and over 75% of homes have computers and Internet access (Web Site Optimization 2010).

Researchers have collected nearly five decades of information on how television has become a way of life in homes. By the time an average child in the United States reaches age 18, he or she will have spent more time watching television than participating in any other single activity besides sleeping. On average, children between ages 8 and 18 spend three hours a day watching television, one hour and 11 minutes watching videos or DVDs, one hour and 44 minutes with audio media, one hour using computers, and 49 minutes playing video games, with a total media exposure in a typical day of eight hours and 33 minutes. The “Engaging Sociology” feature on the next page shows total media exposure of children by several variables (Rideout, Foehr, and Roberts 2010). Examine this issue in more depth by answering the questions following the table.

The moguls of mass media—a meso-level social system—are able to influence socialization within the most intimate of environments. “Children [in the United States] use computers at very young ages—21% of children 2 years and younger, 58% of 3- to 4-year-olds, and 77% of 5- to 6-year-olds” (National Science Foundation 2005:1). Seventy-four percent of the U.S. population now uses the Internet (Internet World Statistics 2009).

A serious concern related to socialization centers on the messages children receive from television and computer games, along with the behavioral effects of these messages. There is ample evidence that children are affected in negative ways by excessive television viewing, especially television violence (National Science Foundation 2005), but a direct causal link between television viewing and behavior is difficult to establish. Researchers know, however, that parents who play an active role in helping children understand the content of television shows can have a powerful effect on mitigating television’s negative impacts and enhancing the positive aspects of television shows. The television-viewing habits of parents—length of viewing time, types of shows watched, times of day—can also influence how their children respond to television.
Examine Tables 4.1 and 4.2 and respond to the questions below.

### Table 4.1  Total Media Exposure (Average Hours per Day)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>8 to 10 years old</th>
<th>7:51</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11 to 14 years old</td>
<td>11:53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15 to 18 years old</td>
<td>11:23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>11:12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>10:17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>8:36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>12:59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>13:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent education</td>
<td>High school or less</td>
<td>11:26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>11:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>College graduate</td>
<td>10:00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4.2  Average Amount of Time per Day Spent With Each Medium: 8- to 18-Year-Olds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>3:47</td>
<td>4:29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music/audio</td>
<td>1:48</td>
<td>2:31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>1:29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video games</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>1:13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movies</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total media exposure</td>
<td>7:29</td>
<td>10:45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multitasking proportion</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Sociological Data Analysis:

1. Considering the data in Tables 4.1 and 4.2, how would you describe television-watching and other media-engaged patterns among different groups?

2. Are the trends in media exposure over the first decade of the twenty-first century a matter of concern? Why or why not?

3. How might media engagement affect other aspects of socialization of children?

4. What might be the social consequences of ethnic minorities (blacks and Hispanics) and those children whose parents do not have a college education having so much higher media exposure each day than whites and the more highly educated?

5. Do your conclusions cause any concerns about your society? Why or why not?

Source: Rideout, Foehr, and Roberts (2010).
Perhaps the most important aspect of television and computers is something that we do not fully understand but that has frightening potential. For the first time in human history, we have powerful agents of socialization in the home from a child’s birth onward. Time spent attending to television or computer games means less time spent engaging in interaction with caregivers and peers. Intimate family bonds formed of affection and meaningful interaction are being altered by the dominant presence of electronic media in the home. In addition, those who control the flood of mass media messages received by children may have interests and concerns that are very much at odds with those of parents. A significant part of the informal socialization process occurs with the assistance of electronic equipment within the home that commands a significant portion of a child’s time and attention.

With globalization, global knowledge and understanding also become important parts of school curricula and media coverage, and we move next to a discussion of some of the national and global processes that impact socialization.

### Thinking Sociologically

What other agents of socialization in addition to family, social class, and electronic media are important in teaching us our roles, norms, values, and beliefs? What is the impact, for example, of friendship networks or peer groups?

### Socialization and Macro-Level Issues

#### Sense of Self Versus the “Other”: Diverse Global Societies

Immigration patterns and ethnic conflicts around the world have resulted in a fairly new phenomenon: transnationalism. **Transnationalism** is the process by which immigrants create multinational social relations that link together their original societies with their new locations. This means that an individual or a family has national loyalty to more than one country (Levitt 2001; Levitt and Waters 2006). Often, it occurs after migration of war refugees, when one’s roots lie in the country of origin and many of one’s close family members continue to live there. Consider children raised in war-torn countries. In the Palestinian territories, especially Gaza, and in Israeli settlements along the border, children grow up with fear and hatred, major influences on their socialization. Some war refugees spend childhoods in refugee camps and may never return to their native countries.

For people experiencing transnationalism, there are conflicting messages about culturally appropriate behaviors and the obligations of loyalty to family and nation. However, one need not migrate to another country to experience global pressures. The Internet and cell phones have increasingly created a sense of connectedness to other parts of the world and an awareness of global interdependencies (Brier 2004; Roach 2004). Some commentators have even suggested that the Internet is a threat to the nation-state as it allows individuals to maintain traditions and loyalties to relatives and friends in more than one country (Drori 2006). Ideas of social justice or progress in many parts of the world are shaped not just by the government that rules the country but by international human rights organizations and ideas that are obtained from media that cross borders, such as the World Wide Web. In recent uprisings in some Middle Eastern and North African countries, social networking kept movement participants in touch with others in the uprisings and with outside media and supporters.

Access to international information and friendships across borders and boundaries are increasingly possible as more people have access to the Internet. Map 4.1, on Internet use around the world, illustrates variability of access but also how widespread this access is becoming. One interesting question is how access or lack of access will influence the strength of “we” versus “they” feelings.

At a time when people lived in isolated rural communities and did not interact with those unlike themselves, there was little price to pay for being bigoted or chauvinistic toward those who were different. However, we now live in a global village where we or our businesses will likely interact with very different people in a competitive environment. If we hold people in low regard because they are unlike us or because we think they are destined for hell because of their spiritual beliefs, there may be a high cost for this alienation toward those who are not like us. Among other problems, terrorism is fermented where people feel alienated. Therefore, diversity training and cultural sensitivity to those “others” have become an economic and political issue.

The reality is that children in the twenty-first century are being socialized to live in a globalized world. Increasingly, children around the world are learning multiple languages to enhance their ability to communicate with others. Some college campuses are requiring experiences abroad as part of the standard curriculum because faculty members and administrators feel that a global perspective is essential in our world today and part of a college education. Socialization to global sensitivity and tolerance of those who were once considered “alien” has become a core element of our day (Robertson 1992; Schaeffer 2003; Snarr and Snarr 2008).
Sometimes, global events can cause a different turn: away from tolerance and toward defensive isolation. When 19 young men from Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern countries crashed planes into the World Trade Center in New York City and into the Pentagon in Washington, DC, the United States was shocked and became mobilized to defend itself and its borders. The messages within schools and from the government suddenly took a more patriotic turn. Then-U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld stated that the problem with America is that citizens do not have a strong enough sense of “we” versus “they.” So this event and other terrorist acts, clearly tragedies rooted in global political conflicts, can intensify boundaries between people and loyalty to the nation-state. Global forces are themselves complex and do not always result in more tolerance.

Indeed, the only thing we can predict with considerable certainty is that in this age of sharing a small planet, the socialization of our citizens will be influenced by events at the macro level, whether national or global.

Map 4.1  Internet Users per 100 People in 2010

Policy and Practice

Should preschoolers living in poverty be socialized in day care settings? Should adolescents work while going to school? Should new parents be required to take child-rearing classes? How should job-training programs be structured? How can communities use the talents and knowledge of retirees? Can the death process be made easier for the dying person and the family? Should we place emphasis in high school and college on in-group loyalty and patriotism or on developing a sense of global citizenship mobilized around common human issues? These are all policy questions—issues of how to establish governing principles that will enhance our common life.

These policy questions rely on an understanding of socialization—how we learn our beliefs and our positions in society. For example, making decisions about how to provide positive early childhood education experiences...
at a time when young children are learning the ways of their culture relies on understanding the socialization they receive at home and at school. The quality of child care we provide for young children will affect not only how effective our future workforce is but also whether children turn out to be productive citizens or a drain on society.

Some sociologists do research to try to help policy makers have accurate data and make good interpretations of the data so they can make wise decisions. Others are more activist, working in the field as applied sociologists trying to solve the problems through private foundations, consulting firms, or state agencies.

Now that we have some understanding of the process of socialization, we look next at the process of interaction and how individuals become members of small groups, networks, and large complex organizations.

What Have We Learned?

Human beings are not born to be noble savages or depraved beasts. As a species, we are remarkable in how many aspects of our lives are shaped by learning—by socialization. Human socialization is pervasive, extensive, and lifelong. We cannot understand what it means to be human without comprehending the impact of a specific culture on us, the influence of our close associates, and the complex interplay of pressures from micro, meso, and macro levels. Indeed, without social interaction, there would not even be a self. We humans are, in our most essential natures, social beings. The purpose of this chapter has been to open our eyes to the ways in which we become the individuals we are.

Key Points:

- Human beings must work with their biological makeup, but most of what makes us uniquely human has to do with things we learn from our culture and society—our socialization. Humans who are not socialized and live in isolation from others are tragic—barely human—creatures. (See pp. 94–97.)
- The self consists of the interaction of the I—the basic impulsive human with drives, needs, and feelings—and the Me—the reflected self one develops by role-taking to see how others might see one. (See pp. 99–102.)
- The self is profoundly shaped by others, but it also has agency—it is an initiator of action and the maker of meaning. (See pp. 99–102.)
- The self develops through stages, from mimicking others (the play stage) to more intellectually sophisticated abilities to role-take and to see how various roles fit together—the play and game stages. (See pp. 99–102.)
- Although the self is somewhat elastic in adjusting to different settings and circumstances, there is also a self that is often vested in meso-level organizations and institutions in which the self participates. (See pp. 107–109.)
- The self is modified as it moves through life stages, and some of those stages require major resocialization—shedding old roles and taking on new ones as one enters new statuses in life. (See pp. 104–105.)
- A number of agents of socialization are at work on each of us, communicating messages that are relevant at the micro, the meso, or the macro level of social life. At the meso level, for example, we may receive different messages about what it means to be a “good” person depending on our ethnic, religious, or social class subculture. (See pp. 105–106.)
- Some of these messages may be in conflict with each other, as when global messages about tolerance for those who are different conflict with a nation’s desire to have absolute loyalty and a sense of superiority. (See pp. 111–112.)
Contributing to Our Social World: What Can We Do?

At the Local Level:

In every community, numerous opportunities exist for volunteer work in helping children from economically and otherwise disadvantaged backgrounds succeed in school.

- Tutor or mentor in the local schools. Contact an education faculty member for information.
- Help in a local boys’ and girls’ club that provides socialization experiences for children through their teens.
- Volunteer in care facilities and hospices for people who are ill or dying to help reduce loneliness and provide positive interaction. Check these opportunities for Academic Service Learning (ASL) credit in which course assignments include such community work under the supervision of the instructor. Find out about ASL programs on your campus.

At the National and Global Levels:

Literacy, one of the most vital components of socialization, remains an unmet need in many parts of the world, especially in the less-developed countries of Africa and Asia.

- World Education. Visit www.worlded.org to learn about this group’s wide variety of projects and volunteer/work opportunities.
- CARE International and Save the Children provide funding for families to send children to school and to receive specialized training. Opportunities exist for fund-raising, internships, or eventually jobs with these organizations.

Visit www.sagepub.com/oswcondensed2e for online activities, sample tests, and other helpful information. Select “Chapter 4: Socialization” for chapter-specific activities.