CHAPTER FOCUS QUESTION: What happens when children do not have an environment that supports positive socialization?

I don’t want to be crippled by things that happened in the past. [My father] was a free bird, you know? He couldn’t handle being a father. [When I learned that my father was terminally ill with cancer,] I thought, even if it’s seven months, I want to get to know this person. Sometimes I’d just sit there, and he’d say, “Stop staring at me.” Then sometimes we’d talk about the past. One day he said, “Perfect. You were made perfect.” I just started crying. I was like, “Thank you, God, for letting me have this moment.”

—I N A RECENT INTERVIEW, actor Drew Barrymore explains how she reconciled with her father, from whom she had been estranged for many years, a short time before his death (Lynch and Gold, 2005: 96, 98). As her previous autobiography Little Girl Lost described, Barrymore and her father had experienced problems in the past:

I think my mom and dad were boyfriend and girlfriend for a couple of years, but they were apart by the time I was born. . . . The earliest memory I have of my father isn’t pleasant. I was three years old. . . . My mom and I were standing in the kitchen, doing the laundry. . . . Suddenly the door swung open and there was this man standing
For Barrymore and many other people, early interactions with their parents have had a profound influence on their later lives. Clearly, the parent–child relationship is a significant factor in the process of socialization, which is of interest to sociologists. Although most children are nurtured, trusted, and loved by their parents, Barrymore’s experience is not an isolated incident: Large numbers of children experience maltreatment at the hands of family members or other caregivers such as baby-sitters or child-care workers. Child maltreatment includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, physical neglect, and emotional mistreatment of children and young adolescents. Such maltreatment is of interest to sociologists because it has a serious impact on a child’s social growth, behavior, and self-image—all of which develop within the process of socialization. By contrast, children who are treated with respect by their parents are more likely to develop a positive self-image and learn healthy conduct because their parents provide appropriate models of behavior.

In this chapter, we examine why socialization is so crucial, and we discuss both sociological and social

Actress Drew Barrymore’s description of childhood maltreatment in her family makes us aware of the importance of early socialization in all our lives. As an adult, she has experienced many happier times, including the honor of receiving a star on Hollywood’s Walk of Fame.
psychological theories of human development. We look at the dynamics of socialization—how it occurs and what shapes it. Throughout the chapter, we focus on positive and negative aspects of the socialization process. Before reading on, test your knowledge of socialization and child care by taking the quiz in Box 4.1.

SHARPENING YOUR FOCUS

What purpose does socialization serve?
How do individuals develop a sense of self?
How does socialization occur?
Who experiences resocialization?

Why Is Socialization Important Around the Globe?

Socialization is the lifelong process of social interaction through which individuals acquire a self-identity and the physical, mental, and social skills needed for survival in society. It is the essential link between the individual and society. Socialization enables each of us to develop our human potential and to learn the ways of thinking, talking, and acting that are necessary for social living.

Socialization is essential for the individual’s survival and for human development. The many people who met the early material and social needs of each of us were central to our establishing our own identity. During the first three years of our life, we begin to develop both a unique identity and the ability to manipulate things and to walk. We acquire sophisticated cognitive tools for thinking and for analyzing a wide variety of situations, and we learn effective communication skills. In the process, we begin a relatively long socialization process that culminates in our integration into a complex social and cultural system (Garcia Coll, 1990).

Socialization is also essential for the survival and stability of society. Members of a society must be socialized to support and maintain the existing social structure. From a functionalist perspective, individual conformity to existing norms is not taken for granted; rather, basic individual needs and desires must be balanced against the needs of the social structure. The socialization process is most effective when people conform to the norms of society because they believe that this is the best course of action. Socialization enables a society to “reproduce” itself by passing on its culture from one generation to the next.

Although the techniques used to teach newcomers the beliefs, values, and rules of behavior are somewhat similar in many nations, the content of socialization differs greatly from society to society. How people walk, talk, eat, make love, and wage war are all functions of the culture in which they are raised. At the same time, we are also influenced by our exposure to subcultures of class, race, ethnicity, religion, and gender. In addition, each of us has unique experiences in our families and friendship groupings. The kind of human being that we become depends greatly on the particular society and social groups that surround us at birth and during early childhood. What we believe about ourselves, our society, and the world does not spring full-blown from inside ourselves; rather, we learn these things from our interactions with others.

Human Development: Biology and Society

What does it mean to be “human”? To be human includes being conscious of ourselves as individuals with unique identities, personalities, and relationships with others. As humans, we have ideas, emotions, and values. We have the capacity to think and to make rational decisions. But what is the source of “humanness”? Are we born with these human characteristics, or do we develop them through our interactions with others?

When we are born, we are totally dependent on others for our survival. We cannot turn ourselves over, speak, reason, plan, or do many of the things that are associated with being human. Although we can nurse, wet, and cry, most small mammals can also do those things. As discussed in Chapter 3, we humans differ from nonhuman animals because we lack instincts.
and must rely on learning for our survival. Human infants have the potential for developing human characteristics if they are exposed to an adequate socialization process.

Every human being is a product of biology, society, and personal experiences—that is, of heredity and environment or, in even more basic terms, “nature” and “nurture.” How much of our development can be explained by socialization? How much by our genetic heritage? Sociologists focus on how humans design their own culture and transmit it from generation to generation through socialization. By contrast, sociobiologists assert that nature, in the form of our genetic makeup, is a major factor in shaping human behavior. **Sociobiology is the systematic study of how biology affects social behavior** (Wilson, 1975). According to the zoologist Edward O. Wilson, who pioneered sociobiology, genetic inheritance underlies many forms of social behavior such as war and peace, envy and concern for others, and competition and cooperation. Most sociologists disagree with the notion that biological principles can be used to explain all human behavior. Obviously, however, some aspects of our physical makeup—such as eye color, hair color, height, and weight—are largely determined by our heredity.

How important is social influence (“nurture”) in human development? There is hardly a single behavior that is not influenced socially. Except for simple reflexes, most human actions are social, either in their causes or in their consequences. Even solitary actions such as crying and brushing our teeth are ultimately social. We cry because someone has hurt us. We brush our teeth because our parents (or dentist) told us it was important. Social environment probably has a greater effect than heredity on the way we develop and the way we act. However, heredity does provide the basic material from which other people help to mold an individual’s human characteristics.

Our biological needs and emotional needs are related in a complex equation. Children whose needs are met in settings characterized by affection, warmth, and closeness see the world as a safe and comfortable place and see other people as trustworthy and helpful. By contrast, infants and children who receive less-than-adequate care or who are emotionally rejected or abused often view the world as hostile and have feelings of suspicion and fear.

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**BOX 4.1 Sociology and Everyday Life**

**How Much Do You Know About Early Socialization and Child Care?**

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*Answers on page 108.*

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**socialization** the lifelong process of social interaction through which individuals acquire a self-identity and the physical, mental, and social skills needed for survival in society.

**sociobiology** the systematic study of how biology affects social behavior.
Problems Associated with Social Isolation and Maltreatment

Social environment, then, is a crucial part of an individual’s socialization. Even nonhuman primates such as monkeys and chimpanzees need social contact with others of their species in order to develop properly. As we will see, appropriate social contact is even more important for humans.

**ISOLATION AND NONHUMAN PRIMATES** Researchers have attempted to demonstrate the effects of social isolation on nonhuman primates raised without contact with others of their own species in order to develop properly. As we will see, appropriate social contact is even more important for humans.

Researchers have attempted to demonstrate the effects of social isolation on nonhuman primates raised without contact with others of their own species. In a series of laboratory experiments, the psychologists Harry and Margaret Harlow (1962, 1977) took infant rhesus monkeys from their mothers and isolated them in separate cages. Each cage contained two nonliving “mother substitutes” made of wire, one with a feeding bottle attached and the other covered with soft terry cloth but without a bottle. The infant monkeys instinctively clung to the cloth “mother” and would not abandon it until hunger drove them to the bottle attached to the wire “mother.” As soon as they were full, they went back to the cloth “mother” seeking warmth, affection, and physical comfort.

The Harlows’ experiments show the detrimental effects of isolation on nonhuman primates. When the young monkeys were later introduced to other members of their species, they cringed in the corner. Having been deprived of social contact with other monkeys during their first six months of life, they never learned how to relate to other monkeys or to become well-adjusted adults—they were fearful of or hostile toward other monkeys (Harlow and Harlow, 1962, 1977).

Because humans rely more heavily on social learning than do monkeys, the process of socialization is even more important for us.

**ISOLATED CHILDREN** Of course, sociologists would never place children in isolated circumstances so that they could observe what happened to them. However, some cases have arisen in which parents or other caregivers failed to fulfill their responsibilities, leaving...
children alone or placing them in isolated circumstances. From analysis of these situations, social scientists have documented cases in which children were deliberately raised in isolation. A look at the lives of two children who suffered such emotional abuse provides important insights into the importance of a positive socialization process and the negative effects of social isolation.

Anna  Born in 1932 to an unmarried, mentally impaired woman, Anna was an unwanted child. She was kept in an attic-like room in her grandfather’s house. Her mother, who worked on the farm all day and often went out at night, gave Anna just enough care to keep her alive; she received no other care. Sociologist Kingsley Davis (1940) described Anna’s condition when she was found in 1938:

[Anna] had no glimmering of speech, absolutely no ability to walk, no sense of gesture, not the least capacity to feed herself even when the food was put in front of her, and no comprehension of cleanliness. She was so apathetic that it was hard to tell whether or not she could hear. And all of this at the age of nearly six years.

When she was placed in a special school and given the necessary care, Anna slowly learned to walk, talk, and care for herself. Just before her death at the age of ten, Anna reportedly could follow directions, talk in phrases, wash her hands, brush her teeth, and try to help other children (Davis, 1940).

Genie  Almost four decades later, Genie was found in 1970 at the age of thirteen. She had been locked in a bedroom alone, alternately strapped down to a child’s potty chair or straitjacketed into a sleeping bag, since she was twenty months old. She had been fed baby food and beaten with a wooden paddle when she whimpered. She had not heard the sounds of human speech because no one talked to her and there was no television or radio in her room (Curtiss, 1977; Pines, 1981). Genie was placed in a
pediatric hospital, where one of the psychologists described her condition:

At the time of her admission she was virtually unsocialized. She could not stand erect, salivated continuously, had never been toilet-trained and had no control over her urinary or bowel functions. She was unable to chew solid food and had the weight, height and appearance of a child half her age. (Rigler, 1993: 35)

In addition to her physical condition, Genie showed psychological traits associated with neglect, as described by one of her psychiatrists:

If you gave [Genie] a toy, she would reach out and touch it, hold it, caress it with her fingertips, as though she didn’t trust her eyes. She would rub it against her cheek to feel it. So when I met her and she began to notice me standing beside her bed, I held my hand out and she reached out and took my hand and carefully felt my thumb and fingers individually, and then put my hand against her cheek. She was exactly like a blind child. (Rymer, 1993: 45)

Extensive therapy was used in an attempt to socialize Genie and develop her language abilities (Curtiss, 1977; Pines, 1981). These efforts met with limited success: In the 1990s, Genie was living in a board-and-care home for retarded adults (see Angier, 1993; Rigler, 1993; Rymer, 1993).

Why do we discuss children who have been the victims of maltreatment in a chapter that looks at the socialization process? The answer lies in the fact that such cases are important to our understanding of the socialization process because they show the importance of this process and reflect how detrimental social isolation and neglect can be to the well-being of people.

Social Psychological Theories of Human Development

Over the past hundred years, a variety of psychological and sociological theories have been developed not only to explain child abuse but also to describe how a positive process of socialization occurs. Let’s look first at several psychological theories that focus primarily on how the individual personality develops.

Freud and the Psychoanalytic Perspective

The basic assumption in Sigmund Freud’s (1924) psychoanalytic approach is that human behavior and personality originate from unconscious forces within individuals. Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), who is known as the founder of psychoanalytic theory, developed his major theories in the Victorian era, when biological explanations of human behavior were prevalent. It was also an era of extreme sexual repression and male dominance when compared to contemporary U.S. standards. Freud’s theory was greatly influenced by these cultural factors, as reflected in the importance he assigned to sexual motives in explaining behavior. For example, Freud based his ideas on the belief that people have two basic tendencies: the urge to survive and the urge to procreate.

According to Freud (1924), human development occurs in three states that reflect different levels of the personality, which he referred to as the id, ego, and superego. The id is the component of personality that includes all of the individual’s basic biological drives and needs that demand immediate gratification. For Freud, the newborn child’s personality is all id, and from birth the child finds that urges for self-gratification—such as wanting to be held, fed, or changed—are not going to be satisfied immediately. However, id remains with people throughout their life in the form of psychic energy, the urges and desires that account for behavior. By contrast, the second level of personality—the ego—develops as infants discover that their most basic desires are not always going to be met by others. The ego is the rational, reality-oriented component of personality that imposes restrictions on the innate,
pleasure-seeking drives of the id. The ego channels the desire of the id for immediate gratification into the most advantageous direction for the individual. The third level of personality—the superego—is in opposition to both the id and the ego. The superego, or conscience, consists of the moral and ethical aspects of personality. It is first expressed as the recognition of parental control and eventually matures as the child learns that parental control is a reflection of the values and moral demands of the larger society. When a person is well adjusted, the ego successfully manages the opposing forces of the id and the superego. Figure 4.1 illustrates Freud’s theory of personality.

Although subject to harsh criticism, Freud’s theory made people aware of the importance of early childhood experiences, including abuse and neglect. His theories have also had a profound influence on contemporary mental health practitioners and on other human development theories.

**Erikson and Psychosocial Development**

Erik H. Erikson (1902–1994) drew from Freud’s theory and identified eight psychosocial stages of development. According to Erikson (1980/1959), each
stage is accompanied by a crisis or potential crisis that involves transitions in social relationships:

1. **Trust versus mistrust** (birth to age one). If infants receive good care and nurturing (characterized by emotional warmth, security, and love) from their parents, they will develop a sense of trust. If they do not receive such care, they will become mistrustful and anxious about their surroundings.

2. **Autonomy versus shame and doubt** (age one to three). As children gain a feeling of control over their behavior and develop a variety of physical and mental abilities, they begin to assert their independence. If allowed to explore their environment, children will grow more autonomous. If parents disapprove of or discourage them, children will begin to doubt their abilities.

3. **Initiative versus guilt** (age three to five). If parents encourage initiative during this stage, children will develop a sense of initiative. If parents make children feel that their actions are bad or that they are a nuisance, children may develop a strong sense of guilt.

4. **Industry versus inferiority** (age six to eleven). At this stage, children want to manipulate objects and learn how things work. Adults who encourage children’s efforts and praise the results—both at home and at school—produce a feeling of industry in children. Feelings of inferiority result when parents or teachers appear to view children’s efforts as silly or as a nuisance.

5. **Identity versus role confusion** (age twelve to eighteen). During this stage, adolescents attempt to develop a sense of identity. As young people take on new roles, the new roles must be combined with the old ones to create a strong self-identity. Role confusion results when individuals fail to acquire an accurate sense of personal identity.

6. **Intimacy versus isolation** (age eighteen to thirty-five). The challenge of this stage (which covers courtship and early family life) is to develop close and meaningful relationships. If individuals establish successful relationships, intimacy ensues. If they fail to do so, they may feel isolated.

7. **Generativity versus self-absorption** (age thirty-five to fifty-five). Generativity means looking beyond oneself and being concerned about the next generation and the future of the world in general. Self-absorbed people may be preoccupied with their own well-being and material gains or be overwhelmed by stagnation, boredom, and interpersonal impoverishment.

8. **Integrity versus despair** (maturity and old age). Integrity results when individuals have resolved previous psychosocial crises and are able to look back at their life as having been meaningful and personally fulfilling. Despair results when previous crises remain unresolved and individuals view their life as a series of disappointments, failures, and misfortunes.

Erikson’s psychosocial stages broaden the framework of Freud’s theory by focusing on social and cultural forces and by examining development throughout the life course. The psychosocial approach encompasses the conflicts that coincide with major changes in a person’s social environment and describes how satisfactory resolution of these conflicts results in positive development. For example, if adolescents who experience an identity crisis are able to determine who they are and what they want from life, they may be able to achieve a positive self-identity and acquire greater psychological distance from their parents.

Critics have pointed out that Erikson’s research was limited to white, middle-class respondents from industrial societies (Slugoski and Ginsburg, 1989). However, other scholars have used his theoretical framework to examine racial–ethnic variations in the
process of psychosocial development. Most of the studies have concluded that all children face the same developmental tasks at each stage but that children of color often have greater difficulty in obtaining a positive outcome because of experiences with racial prejudice and discrimination in society (Rotheram and Phinney, 1987). Although establishing an identity is difficult for most adolescents, one study found that it was especially problematic for children of recent Asian American immigrants who had experienced high levels of stress related to immigration (Huang and Ying, 1989).

Piaget and Cognitive Development

Unlike psychoanalytic approaches, which focus primarily on personality development, cognitive approaches emphasize the intellectual (cognitive) development of children. The Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget (1896–1980) was a pioneer in the field of cognitive development. Cognitive theorists are interested in how people obtain, process, and use information—that is, in how we think. Cognitive development relates to changes over time in how we think.

According to Piaget (1954), in each stage of human development (from birth through adolescence), children’s activities are governed by their perception of the world around them. His four stages of cognitive development are organized around specific tasks that, when mastered, lead to the acquisition of new mental capacities, which then serve as the basis for the next level of development. Thus, development is a continuous process of successive changes in which the child must go through each stage in the sequence before moving on to the next one. However, Piaget believed that the length of time each child remained in a specific stage would vary based on the child’s individual attributes and the cultural context in which the development process occurred.

1. Sensorimotor stage (birth to age two). Children understand the world only through sensory contact and immediate action; they cannot engage in symbolic thought or use language. Children gradually comprehend object permanence—the realization that objects exist even when the items are placed out of their sight.

2. Preoperational stage (age two to seven). Children begin to use words as mental symbols and to form mental images. However, they have limited ability to use logic to solve problems or to realize that physical objects may change in shape or appearance but still retain their physical properties.

3. Concrete operational stage (age seven to eleven). Children think in terms of tangible objects and actual events. They can draw conclusions about
Piaget’s stages of cognitive development provide us with useful insights on children’s logical thinking and how children invent or construct the rules that govern their understanding of the world. His views on moral development show that children move from greater external influence, such as parental and other forms of moral authority, to being more autonomous, based on their own moral judgments about behavior. However, critics have pointed out that his theory says little about children’s individual differences, including how gender or culture may influence children’s beliefs and actions.

Kohlberg and the Stages of Moral Development

Lawrence Kohlberg (1927–1987) elaborated on Piaget’s theories of cognitive reasoning by conducting a series of studies in which children, adolescents, and adults were presented with moral dilemmas that took the form of stories. Based on his findings, Kohlberg (1969, 1981) classified moral reasoning into three sequential levels:

1. **Preconventional level** (age seven to ten). Children’s perceptions are based on punishment and obedience. Evil behavior is that which is likely to be punished; good conduct is based on obedience and avoidance of unwanted consequences.

2. **Conventional level** (age ten through adulthood). People are most concerned with how they are perceived by their peers and with how one conforms to rules.

3. **Postconventional level** (few adults reach this stage). People view morality in terms of individual rights; “moral conduct” is judged by principles based on human rights that transcend government and laws.

Although Kohlberg presents interesting ideas about the moral judgments of children, some critics have challenged the universality of his stages of moral development. They have also suggested that the elaborate “moral dilemmas” he used are too abstract for children. In one story, for example, a husband contemplates stealing for his critically ill wife medicine that he cannot afford. When questions are made sim-
pler, or when children and adolescents are observed in natural (as opposed to laboratory) settings, they often demonstrate sophisticated levels of moral reasoning (Darley and Shultz, 1990; Lapsley, 1990).

**Gilligan’s View on Gender and Moral Development**

Psychologist Carol Gilligan (b. 1936) is one of the major critics of Kohlberg’s theory of moral development. According to Gilligan (1982), Kohlberg’s model was developed solely on the basis of research with male respondents, and women and men often have divergent views on morality based on differences in socialization and life experiences. Gilligan believes that men become more concerned with law and order but that women analyze social relationships and the social consequences of behavior. For example, in Kohlberg’s story about the man who is thinking about stealing medicine for his wife, Gilligan argues that male respondents are more likely to use abstract standards of right and wrong, whereas female respondents are more likely to be concerned about what consequences his stealing the drug might have for the man and his family. Does this constitute a “moral deficiency” on the part of either women or men? Not according to Gilligan.

To correct what she perceived to be a male bias in Kohlberg’s research, Gilligan (1982) examined morality in women by interviewing twenty-nine pregnant women who were contemplating having an abortion. Based on her research, Gilligan concluded that Kohlberg’s stages do not reflect the ways that many women think about moral problems. As a result, Gilligan identified three stages in female moral development. In stage 1, the woman is motivated primarily by selfish concerns (“This is what I want . . . this is what I need”). In stage 2, she increasingly recognizes her responsibility to others. In stage 3, she makes a decision based on her desire to do the greatest good for both herself and for others. Gilligan argued that men are socialized to make moral decisions based on a justice perspective (“What is the fairest thing to do?”), whereas women are socialized to make such decisions on a care and responsibility perspective (“Who will be hurt least?”).

Subsequent research that directly compared women’s and men’s reasoning about moral dilemmas has supported some of Gilligan’s assertions but not others. For example, some researchers have not found that women are more compassionate than men (Tavris, 1993). Overall, however, Gilligan’s argument that people make moral decisions according to both abstract principles of justice and principles of compassion and care is an important contribution to our knowledge about moral reasoning. Her book *In a Different Voice* (1982) also made social scientists more aware that the same situation may be viewed quite differently by men and by women.

**Sociological Theories of Human Development**

Although social scientists acknowledge the contributions of psychoanalytic and psychologically based explanations of human development, sociologists believe that it is important to bring a sociological perspective to bear on how people develop an awareness of self and learn about the culture in which they live. According to a sociological perspective, we cannot form a sense of self or personal identity without intense social contact with others. The self represents the sum total of perceptions and feelings that an individual has of being a distinct, unique person—a sense of who and what one is. When we speak of the “self,” we typically use words such as I, me, my, mine, and myself (Cooley, 1998/1902). This sense of self (also referred to self-concept) is not present at birth; it arises in the process of social experience. **Self-concept is the totality of our beliefs and feelings about ourselves.**

Four components make up our self-concept: (1) the physical self (“I am tall”), (2) the active self (“I am good at soccer”), (3) the social self (“I am nice to others”), and (4) the psychological self (“I believe in world peace”). Between early and late childhood, a child’s focus tends to shift from the physical and active dimensions of self toward the social and psychological aspects. Self-concept is the foundation for communication with others; it continues to develop and change throughout our lives.

Our **self-identity** is our perception about what kind of person we are. As we have seen, socially isolated children do not have typical self-identities; they have had no experience of “humanness.” According to symbolic interactionists, we do not know who we are until we see ourselves as we believe that others see us. We gain information about the self largely through language, symbols, and interaction with others. Our interpretation and evaluation of these messages are central to the social construction of our identity. However, we
are not just passive reactors to situations, programmed by society to respond in fixed ways. Instead, we are active agents who develop plans out of the pieces supplied by culture and attempt to execute these plans in social encounters (McCall and Simmons, 1978).

Cooley, Mead, and Symbolic Interactionist Perspectives

Social constructionism is a term that is applied to theories that emphasize the socially created nature of social life. This perspective is linked to symbolic interactionist theory, and its roots can be traced to the Chicago School and early theorists such as Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert Mead.

COOLEY AND THE LOOKING-GLASS SELF  According to the sociologist Charles Horton Cooley (1864–1929), the looking-glass self refers to the way in which a person’s sense of self is derived from the perceptions of others. Our looking-glass self is not who we actually are or what people actually think about us; rather, it is based on our perception of how other people think of us (Cooley, 1998/1902). Cooley asserted that we base our perception of who we are on how we think other people see us and on whether this opinion seems good or bad to us.

As Figure 4.2 shows, the looking-glass self is a self-concept derived from a three-step process:

1. We imagine how our personality and appearance will look to other people. We may imagine that we are attractive or unattractive, heavy or slim, friendly or unfriendly, and so on.  
2. We imagine how other people judge the appearance and personality that we think we present. This step involves our perception of how we think they are judging us. We may be correct or incorrect!  
3. We develop a self-concept. If we think the evaluation of others is favorable, our self-concept is enhanced. If we think the evaluation is unfavorable, our self-concept is diminished. (Cooley, 1998/1902)

According to Cooley, we use our interactions with others as a mirror for our own thoughts and actions; our sense of self depends on how we interpret what others do and say. Consequently, our sense of self is not permanently fixed; it is always developing as we interact with others in the larger society. For Cooley, self and society are merely two sides of the same coin: “Self and society go together, as phases of a common whole. I am aware of the social groups in which I live as immediately and authentically as I am aware of myself” (Cooley, 1963/1909: 8–9). Accordingly, the self develops only through contact with others, just as social institutions and societies do not exist independently of the interaction of acting individuals (Schubert, 1998). By developing the idea of the looking-glass self, Cooley made us aware of the mutual interrelationship between the individual and society—namely, that society shapes people and people shape society.
MEAD AND ROLE-TAKING  George Herbert Mead (1863–1931) extended Cooley’s insights by linking the idea of self-concept to role-taking—the process by which a person mentally assumes the role of another person or group in order to understand the world from that person’s or group’s point of view. Role-taking often occurs through play and games, as children try out different roles (such as being mommy, daddy, doctor, or teacher) and gain an appreciation of them. First, people come to take the role of the other (role-taking). By taking the roles of others, the individual hopes to ascertain the intention or direction of the acts of others. Then the person begins to construct his or her own roles (role-making) and to anticipate other individuals’ responses. Finally, the person plays at her or his particular role (role-playing).

According to Mead (1934), in the early months of life, children do not realize that they are separate from others. However, they do begin early on to see a mirrored image of themselves in others. Shortly after birth, infants start to notice the faces of those around them, especially the significant others, whose faces start to have meaning because they are associated with experiences such as feeding and cuddling. Significant others are those persons whose care, affection, and approval are especially desired and who are most important in the development of the self. Gradually, we distinguish ourselves from our caregivers and begin to perceive ourselves in contrast to them. As we develop language skills and learn to understand symbols, we begin to develop a self-concept. When we can represent ourselves in our minds as objects distinct from everything else, our self has been formed. Mead (1934) divided the self into the “I” and the “me.” The “I” is the subjective element of the self and represents the spontaneous and unique traits of each person. The “me” is the objective element of the self, which is composed of the internalized attitudes and demands of other members of society and the individual’s awareness of those demands. Both the “I” and

**looking-glass self** Charles Horton Cooley’s term for the way in which a person's sense of self is derived from the perceptions of others.

**role-taking** the process by which a person mentally assumes the role of another person in order to understand the world from that person’s point of view.

**significant others** those persons whose care, affection, and approval are especially desired and who are most important in the development of the self.
the "me" are needed to form the social self. The unity of the two constitutes the full development of the individual. According to Mead, the "I" develops first, and the "me" takes form during the three stages of self development:

1. During the preparatory stage, up to about age three, interactions lack meaning, and children largely imitate the people around them. At this stage, children are preparing for role-taking.
2. In the play stage, from about age three to five, children learn to use language and other symbols, thus enabling them to pretend to take the roles of specific people. At this stage, they begin to see themselves in relation to others, but they do not see role-taking as something they have to do.
3. During the game stage, which begins in the early school years, children understand not only their own social position but also the positions of others around them. In contrast to play, games are structured by rules, are often competitive, and involve a number of other "players." At this time, children become concerned about the demands and expectations of others and of the larger society. Mead used the example of a baseball game to describe this stage because children, like baseball players, must take into account the roles of all the other players at the same time. Mead's concept of the
generalized other refers to the child’s awareness of the demands and expectations of the society as a whole or of the child’s subculture.

Is socialization a one-way process? No, according to Mead. Socialization is a two-way process between society and the individual. Just as the society in which we live helps determine what kind of individuals we will become, we have the ability to shape certain aspects of our social environment and perhaps even the larger society.

How useful are symbolic interactionist perspectives such as Cooley’s and Mead’s in enhancing our understanding of the socialization process? Certainly, this approach contributes to our understanding of how the self develops. Cooley’s idea of the looking-glass self makes us aware that our perception of how we think others see us is not always correct. Mead extended Cooley’s ideas by emphasizing the cognitive skills acquired through role-taking. His concept of the generalized other helps us see that the self is a social creation. According to Mead (1934: 196), “Selves can only exist in definite relations to other selves. No hard-and-fast line can be drawn between our own selves and the selves of others.” However, the viewpoints of symbolic interactionists such as Cooley and Mead have certain limitations. Sociologist Anne Kaspar (1986) suggests that Mead’s ideas about the social self may be more applicable to men than to women because women are more likely to experience inherent conflicts between the meanings they derive from their personal experiences and those they take from the culture, particularly in regard to balancing the responsibilities of family life and paid employment. (Concept Table 4.A summarizes the major theories of human development.)

**Recent Symbolic Interactionist Perspectives**

The symbolic interactionist approach emphasizes that socialization is a collective process in which children are active and creative agents, not just passive recipients of the socialization process. From this view, childhood is a *socially constructed* category (Adler and Adler, 1998). Children are capable of actively constructing their own shared meanings as they acquire language skills and accumulate interactive experiences (Qvortrup, 1990). According to the sociologist William A. Corsaro’s (1985, 1997) “orb web model,” children’s cultural knowledge reflects not only the beliefs of the adult world but also the unique interpretations and aspects of the children’s own peer culture. Corsaro (1992: 162) states that peer culture is “a stable set of activities or routines, artifacts, values, and concerns that children

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**Concept Table 4.A**

**Psychological and Sociological Theories of Human Development**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Psychological Theories of Human Development</th>
<th>Freud’s psychoanalytic perspective</th>
<th>Children first develop the id (drives and needs), then the ego (restrictions on the id), and then the superego (moral and ethical aspects of personality).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Piaget’s cognitive development</td>
<td>Children go through four stages of cognitive (intellectual) development, going from understanding only through sensory contact to engaging in highly abstract thought.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kohlberg’s stages of moral development</td>
<td>People go through three stages of moral development, from avoidance of unwanted consequences to viewing morality based on human rights.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilligan: gender and moral development</td>
<td>Women go through stages of moral development from personal wants to the greatest good for themselves and others.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sociological Theories of Human Development</th>
<th>Cooley’s looking-glass self</th>
<th>A person’s sense of self is derived from his or her perception of how others view him or her.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mead’s three stages of self-development</td>
<td>In the preparatory stage, children imitate the people around them; in the play stage, children pretend to take the roles of specific people; and in the game stage, children learn the demands and expectations of roles.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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*generalized other* George Herbert Mead’s term for the child’s awareness of the demands and expectations of the society as a whole or of the child’s subculture.
produce and share.” This peer culture emerges through interactions as children “borrow” from the adult culture but transform it so that it fits their own situation. Based on ethnographic studies of U.S. and Italian preschoolers, Corsaro found that very young children engage in predictable patterns of interaction. For example, when playing together, children often permit some children to gain access to their group and play area while preventing others from becoming a part of their group. Children also play “approach–avoidance” games in which they alternate between approaching a threatening person or group and then running away. In fact, Corsaro (1992) believes that the peer group is the most significant public realm for children. (Peer groups as agents of socialization are discussed later in the chapter.) This approach contributes to our knowledge about human development because it focuses on group life rather than individuals. Researchers using this approach “look at social relations, the organization and meanings of social situations, and the collective practices through which children create and recreate key constructs in their daily interactions” (Adler and Adler, 1998: 10; see also Thorne, 1993; Eder, 1995).

**Ecological Perspectives**

Another approach that emphasizes cultural or environmental influences on human development is the ecological perspective. One of the best-known ecological approaches is developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner’s (1989) ecological systems theory. The ecological systems in this theory are the interactions a child has with other people, and how those interactions are affected by other people and situations. The four ecological systems are as follows, starting with the one closest to the child: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem. In the microsystem, a child is engaged in immediate face-to-face interaction with the child’s parents, siblings, and other immediate family members. By contrast, in the mesosystem, the child’s interactions with family members are influenced by the interactions of those family members. For example, how the mother reacts to her son is influenced by how she is getting along with the father. The exosystem relates to how the immediate family members are influenced by another setting, such as the mother’s job. Finally, the macrosystem involves how interaction with the child is affected by all the components of the larger society, including public policy, such as child-care legislation.

Bronfenbrenner’s ecological perspective provides interesting insights on the overall context in which child development occurs. However, research using this approach is somewhat difficult because of the complex nature of the systems approach that he suggests. As a result, many sociological studies have focused on specific agents of socialization rather than the larger societal context in which child development occurs.

### Agents of Socialization

**Agents of socialization** are the persons, groups, or institutions that teach us what we need to know in order to participate in society. We are exposed to many agents of socialization throughout our lifetime; in turn, we have an influence on those socializing agents and organizations. Here, we look at the most pervasive ones in childhood—the family, the school, peer groups, and the mass media.

**The Family**

The family is the most important agent of socialization in all societies. From infancy, our families transmit cultural and social values to us. As discussed later in this book, families vary in size and structure. Some families consist of two parents and their biological children, whereas others consist of a single parent and one or more children. Still other families reflect changing patterns of divorce and remarriage, and an increasing number are made up of same-sex partners and their children. Over time, patterns have changed in some two-parent families so that fathers, rather than mothers, are the primary daytime agents of socialization for their young children.

Therists using a functionalist perspective emphasize that families serve important functions in society because they are the primary locus for the procreation and socialization of children. Most of us form an emerging sense of self and acquire most of our beliefs and values within the family context. We also learn about the larger dominant culture (including language, attitudes, beliefs, values, and norms) and the primary subcultures to which our parents and other relatives belong.

Families are also the primary source of emotional support. Ideally, people receive love, understanding, security, acceptance, intimacy, and companionship within families. The role of the family is especially significant because young children have little social experience beyond the family’s boundaries; they have no basis for comparing or evaluating how they are treated by their own family.

To a large extent, the family is where we acquire our specific social position in society. From birth, we are a
part of the specific racial, ethnic, class, religious, and regional subcultural grouping of our family. Studies show that families socialize their children somewhat differently based on race, ethnicity, and class (Kohn, 1977; Kohn et al., 1990; Harrison et al., 1990). For example, sociologist Melvin Kohn (1977; Kohn et al., 1990) has suggested that social class (as measured by parental occupation) is one of the strongest influences on what and how parents teach their children. On the one hand, working-class parents, who are closely supervised and expected to follow orders at work, typically emphasize to their children the importance of obedience and conformity. On the other hand, parents from the middle and professional classes, who have more freedom and flexibility at work, tend to give their children more freedom to make their own decisions and to be creative. Kohn concluded that differences in parents’ occupations were a better predictor of child-rearing practices than was social class itself.

Whether or not Kohn’s findings are valid today, the issues he examined make us aware that not everyone has the same family experiences. Many factors—including our cultural background, nation of origin, religion, and gender—are important in determining how we are socialized by family members and others who are a part of our daily life.

Conflict theorists stress that socialization contributes to false consciousness—a lack of awareness and a distorted perception of the reality of class as it affects all aspects of social life. As a result, socialization reaffirms and reproduces the class structure in the next generation rather than challenging the conditions that presently exist. For example, children in low-income families may be unintentionally socialized to believe that acquiring an education and aspiring to lofty ambitions are pointless because of existing economic conditions in the family (Ballantine, 2001). By contrast, middle- and upper-income families typically instill ideas of monetary and social success in children while encouraging them to think and behave in “socially acceptable” ways.

The social constructionist/symbolic interactionist perspective helps us recognize that children affect their parents’ lives and change the overall household environment. When we examine the context in which family life takes place, we also see that grandparents and other relatives have a strong influence on how parents socialize their children. In turn, the children’s behavior may have an effect on how parents, siblings, and grandparents get along with one another. For example, in families where there is already intense personal conflict, the birth of an infant may intensify the stress and discord, sometimes resulting in child maltreatment, spousal battering, or elder abuse. By contrast, in families where partners feel happiness and personal satisfaction, the birth of an infant may contribute to the success of the marriage and bring about positive interpersonal communications among relatives.

The School

As the amount of specialized technical and scientific knowledge has expanded rapidly and as the amount of time that children are in educational settings has increased, schools continue to play an enormous role in the socialization of young people. For many people, the formal education process is an undertaking that lasts up to twenty years.
As the number of one-parent families and families in which both parents work outside the home has increased dramatically, the number of children in day-care and preschool programs has also grown rapidly. Currently, about 60 percent of all U.S. preschool children are in day care, either in private homes or institutional settings, and this percentage continues to climb (Children’s Defense Fund, 2002). Generally, studies have found that quality day-care and preschool programs have a positive effect on the overall socialization of children. These programs provide children with the opportunity to have frequent interactions with teachers and to learn how to build their language and literacy skills. High-quality programs also have a positive effect on the academic performance of children, particularly those from low-income families. For example, several states with pre-kindergarten programs reported an increase in children’s math and reading scores, school attendance records, and parents’ involvement in their children’s education (Children’s Defense Fund, 2002). Today, however, the cost of child-care programs has become a major concern for many families (see Box 4.2 on pages 124–125).

Although schools teach specific knowledge and skills, they also have a profound effect on children’s self-image, beliefs, and values. As children enter school for the first time, they are evaluated and systematically compared with one another by the teacher. A permanent, official record is kept of each child’s personal behavior and academic activities. From a functionalist perspective, schools are responsible for (1) socialization, or teaching students to be productive members of society; (2) transmission of culture; (3) social control and personal development; and (4) the selection, training, and placement of individuals on different rungs in the society (Ballantine, 2001).

In contrast, conflict theorists assert that students have different experiences in the school system depending on their social class, their racial–ethnic background, the neighborhood in which they live, their gender, and other factors. According to the sociologists Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1976), much of what happens in school amounts to teaching a hidden curriculum in which children learn to be neat, to be on time, to be quiet, to wait their turn, and to remain attentive to their work. Thus, schools do not socialize children for their own well-being but rather for their later roles in the work force, where it is important to be punctual and to show deference to supervisors. Students who are destined for leadership or elite positions acquire different skills and knowledge than those who will enter working-class and middle-class occupations (see Cookson and Persell, 1985).

Symbolic interactionists examining socialization in the school environment might focus on how daily interactions and practices in schools affect the construction of students’ beliefs regarding such things as patriotism, feelings of aggression or cooperation, and gender practices as they influence girls and boys. For example, some studies have shown that the school environment often fosters a high degree of gender segregation, including having boys and girls line up separately to participate in different types of extracurricular activities in middle schools and high schools (Eder, 1995; Thorne, 1993).

**Peer Groups**

As soon as we are old enough to have acquaintances outside the home, most of us begin to rely heavily on peer groups as a source of information and approval about social behavior. A peer group is a group of
people who are linked by common interests, equal social position, and (usually) similar age. In early childhood, peer groups are often composed of classmates in day care, preschool, and elementary school. Recent studies have found that preadolescence—the latter part of the elementary school years—is an age period in which children’s peer culture has an important effect on how children perceive themselves and how they internalize society’s expectations (Adler and Adler, 1998). In adolescence, peer groups are typically made up of people with similar interests and social activities. As adults, we continue to participate in peer groups of people with whom we share common interests and comparable occupations, income, and/or social position.

Peer groups function as agents of socialization by contributing to our sense of “belonging” and our feelings of self-worth. As early as the preschool years, peer groups provide children with an opportunity for successful adaptation to situations such as gaining access to ongoing play, protecting shared activities from intruders, and building solidarity and mutual trust during ongoing activities (Corsaro, 1985; Rizzo and Corsaro, 1995). Unlike families and schools, peer groups provide children and adolescents with some degree of freedom from parents and other authority figures (Corsaro, 1992). Although peer groups afford children some degree of freedom, they also teach cultural norms such as what constitutes “acceptable” behavior in a specific situation. Peer groups simultaneously reflect the larger culture and serve as a conduit for passing on culture to young people. As a result, the peer group is both a product of culture and one of its major transmitters (Elkin and Handel, 1989).

Is there such a thing as “peer pressure”? Individuals must earn their acceptance with their peers by conforming to a given group’s norms, attitudes, speech patterns, and dress codes. When we conform to our peer group’s expectations, we are rewarded; if we do not conform, we may be ridiculed or even expelled from the group. Conforming to the demands of peers frequently places children and adolescents at cross purposes with their parents. For example, young people are frequently under pressure to obtain certain valued material possessions (such as toys, clothing, athletic shoes, or cell phones); they then pass the pressure on to their parents through emotional pleas to purchase the desired items. Peer pressure and the adult tensions that often accompany this kind of pressure are not unique to families in the United States (see Box 4.3 on pages 126–127).

Mass Media

An agent of socialization that has a profound impact on both children and adults is the mass media, composed of large-scale organizations that use print or electronic means (such as radio, television, film, and the Internet) to communicate with large numbers of people. The media function as socializing agents in several ways: (1) they inform us about events; (2) they introduce us to a wide variety of people; (3) they provide an array of viewpoints on current issues; (4) they make us aware of products and services that, if we purchase them, will supposedly help us to be accepted by others; and (5) they entertain us by providing the opportunity to live vicariously (through other people’s experiences). Although most of us take for granted that the media play an important part in contemporary socialization, we frequently underestimate the enormous influence this agent of socialization may have on children’s attitudes and behavior.

Recent studies have shown that U.S. children, on average, are spending more time each year in front of TV sets, computers, and video games. According to the Annenberg Public Policy Center (University of Pennsylvania) study on media in the home, “The introduction of new media continues to transform the

peer group a group of people who are linked by common interests, equal social position, and (usually) similar age.
Rather than displacing television as the dominant medium, new technologies have supplemented it, resulting in an aggregate increase in electronic media penetration and use by America’s youth” (qtd. in Dart, 1999: A5). It is estimated that U.S. children spend 2.5 hours per day watching television programs and about 2 hours with computers, video games, or a VCR, which adds up to about 1,642 hours per year (Dart, 1999). By contrast, U.S. children spend about 1,000 hours per year in school. Considering television-watching time alone, by the time that students graduate from high school, they will have spent more time in front of the television set than in the classroom (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 1997; Dart, 1999). Perhaps it is no surprise that

Day-care centers have become important agents of socialization for increasing numbers of children. Today, about 60 percent of all U.S. preschool children are in day care of one kind or another.

Who Should Pay for Child Care?

Child care is the largest expense I have. It exceeds everything. It’s higher than rent, higher than food. It’s higher than everything we have.

We have come to a point, well, do we send the children to a good daycare or do we send them to a not-so-good daycare so we can pay for it?
—Sean Pokorny (CBS News, 2004)

Sean and Elizabeth Pokorny are among a growing number of couples in the United States who face a significant problem: the high cost of child care for their children. Elizabeth is an accountant, and Sean is a mechanic; however, even with their two paychecks, the Pokornys are concerned about the cost of quality day care, which for them is about $1,000 a month. For single-parent families with just one paycheck, the problem may be even more acute.

Although paying for child care is a major issue in the United States, it is not as large a concern in most other high-income countries, where the government typically provides all or almost all of the cost of child care for children above two years of age. By way of example, whereas about 25 to 30 percent of the cost of child care for three-to six-year-olds is provided by the government in the United States, France provides 100 percent, and Denmark,
the Annenberg researchers found that 93 percent of children between the ages of 10 and 17 know that Homer, Bart, and Maggie are characters on the animated Fox series *The Simpsons* whereas only 63 percent could name the vice president of the United States (Dart, 1999).

Parents, educators, social scientists, and public officials have widely debated the consequences of young people watching that much television. Television has been praised for offering numerous positive experiences to children. Some scholars suggest that television (when used wisely) can enhance children’s development by improving their language abilities, concept-formation skills, and reading skills and by encouraging prosocial development (Winn, 1985). However, other studies have shown that children and

Finland, and Sweden provide about 80 of that cost (The Future of Children, 2001).

Some people believe that programs such as Head Start and state-funded pre-kindergarten programs provide all the child care that working parents in the United States should need for their young children; however, this is not an accurate assumption. Although Head Start and other government-funded child care programs are important to working families, particularly those at or below the poverty line, these programs do not have adequate funding to achieve their primary purpose, which is to prepare children for school, much less to provide quality child care that is free or at least affordable to low-income parents and that is available at the hours around the clock that many of these parents are required to work. Consider, for example, parents who are employed in the food and entertainment industry and must work nights and holidays, or parents in cities such as Las Vegas and Reno, Nevada, where one of the primary sources of jobs is in the gaming industry (such as casinos that remain open 24 hours per day). Their children may need care on a 24/7 basis, rather than during the standard hours of the typical Head Start or state-funded pre-kindergarten program, which typically are available for only a few hours each day.

How might parents, especially those in low-income brackets, find affordable child care? Some people believe that it should be the parents’ responsibility—that the parents should not have children whom they cannot afford to raise. Other people believe that paying for child care should be the responsibility of the government. However, for the government to contribute more to the cost of child care, we would need a refocused view of this issue, a view which suggests that it is a national concern and that it is critical to meeting two of our nation’s priorities: helping families work and making sure that all children enter school ready to learn (Children’s Defense Fund, 2003). Today, however, there is currently little hope that political leaders who are working to cut spending and balance budgets will see child care as a top priority.

Still other people believe that if the government is not going to bear the financial responsibility for child care, employers should be the ones to pay that cost because they benefit the most from the hours that their workers spend on the job. Without safe, reliable, affordable care for their children, employees may find it more difficult to be productive workers. Likewise, the cost of quality child care is a concern not only for families in low-income brackets, but also for many middle-class families that are feeling the squeeze of high gas prices, food costs, and rent or home-mortgage payments.

What are the chances that more employers will help fund child care? Generally, it appears that too few employers are willing or able to provide real help with child care in the twenty-first century. Many employers complain of sharply rising health care costs for their employees and believe that global competition is cutting into their earnings, thus making funding of child care for their employees a luxury that the employers simply cannot afford.

Are the financial constraints at various levels of government and in corporate America so great that these social institutions simply cannot afford to put money into child care and an investment in the nation’s future? Or are our priorities confused so that we are spending money for things that are less important to the future of the nation than our children? If we truly mean it when we say that we want to “leave no child behind,” perhaps we should rethink our priorities in regard to the funding of child care. Do we have a responsibility for the children of this nation? Or are children the sole responsibility of their families, regardless of the parents’ ability to pay the high cost of properly caring for and educating children in the United States? What do you think?
adolescents who spend a lot of time watching television often have lower grades in school, read fewer books, exercise less, and are overweight (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 1997).

Of special concern to many people is the issue of television violence. It is estimated that the typical young person who watches 28 hours of television a week will have seen 16,000 simulated murders and 200,000 acts of violence by the time he or she reaches age 18. A report by the American Psychological Association states that about 80 percent of all television programs contain acts of violence and that commercial television for children is 50 to 60 times more violent than prime-time television for adults. For example, some cartoons average more than 80 violent acts per hour (APA Online, 2000).

**BOX 4.3 Sociology in Global Perspective**

The Youthful Cry Heard Around the World: “Everybody Else Has a Cell Phone! Why Can’t I Have One?”

- More than 80 percent of high school students and 25 percent of junior high (middle school) students in Japan have cell phones.
- About 75 percent of all teenagers in Scandinavia have cell phones.
- More than 50 percent of all 7- to 16-year-olds in the United Kingdom have cell phones (Magid, 2004).
- About 6.6 million of the 20 million children between the ages of 8 and 12 years in the United States have a cell phone, and it is estimated that there will be at least 10.5 million preteen cell phone users by 2010 (Foderaro, 2007).

As these figures reflect, children and adolescents in high-income nations around the world are increasingly connected with other people by their own cell phones (referred to as “mobile phones” in some countries), which are not entirely under the control of their parents or other adult supervisors. Increasing numbers of elementary-school children as young as age six view a cell phone as a “must-have techno-toy” and as a status symbol that will impress their friends (Foderaro, 2007).

How do cell phones relate to socialization? Child-oriented cell phone use constitutes a shift from earlier times, when parents or other relatives typically were the most significant agents of socialization in a child’s life.
In addition to concerns about violence in television programming, motion pictures, and electronic games, television shows have been criticized for projecting negative images of women and people of color. Although the mass media have changed some of the roles that they depict women as playing (such as showing Xena, Warrior Princess, who is able to vanquish everything that stands in her way), even these newer images tend to reinforce existing stereotypes of women as sex symbols because of the clothing they wear in their action adventures. Throughout this text, we will look at additional examples of how the media—ranging from advertising and television programs to video games and the Internet—socialize all of us, particularly when we are young, in ways that we may or may not realize. For example, cultural studies scholars and some postmodern theorists
believe that “media culture” has in recent years dramatically changed the socialization process for very young children.

**Gender and Racial–Ethnic Socialization**

*Gender socialization* is the aspect of socialization that contains specific messages and practices concerning the nature of being female or male in a specific group or society. Gender socialization is important in determining what we think the “preferred” sex of a child should be and in influencing our beliefs about acceptable behaviors for males and females. In some families, gender socialization starts before birth. Parents who learn the sex of the fetus through ultrasound or amniocentesis often purchase color-coded and gender-typed clothes, toys, and nursery decorations in anticipation of their daughter’s or son’s arrival. After the child has been born, parents may respond differently toward male and female infants; they often play more roughly with boys and talk more lovingly to girls. Throughout childhood and adolescence, boys and girls are typically assigned different household chores and given different privileges (such as how late they may stay out at night).

When we look at the relationship between gender socialization and social class, the picture becomes more complex. Although some studies have found less-rigid gender stereotyping in higher-income families (Seegmiller, Suter, and Duviant, 1980; Brooks-Gunn, 1986), others have found more (Bardwell, Cochran, and Walker, 1986). One study found that higher-income families are more likely than low-income families to give “male-oriented” toys (which develop visual/spatial and problem-solving skills) to children of both sexes (Serbin et al., 1990). Working-class families tend to adhere to more-rigid gender expectations than do middle-class families (Canter and Ageton, 1984; Brooks-Gunn, 1986).

We are limited in our knowledge about gender socialization practices among racial–ethnic groups because most studies have focused on white, middle-class families. In a study of African American families, the sociologist Janice Hale-Benson (1986) found that children typically are not taught to think of gender strictly in “male–female” terms. Both daughters and sons are socialized toward autonomy, independence, self-confidence, and nurturance of children (Bardwell, Cochran, and Walker, 1986). Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (1990) has suggested that “othermothers” (women other than a child’s biological mother) play an important part in the gender socialization and motivation of African American children, especially girls. Othermothers often serve as gender role models and encourage women to become activists on behalf of their children and community (Collins, 1990). By contrast, studies of Korean American and Latino/a families have found more traditional gender socialization (Min, 1988), although some evidence indicates that this pattern may be changing (Jaramillo and Zaptia, 1987).

Like the family, schools, peer groups, and the media contribute to our gender socialization. From kindergarten through college, teachers and peers reward gender-appropriate attitudes and behavior. Sports reinforce traditional gender roles through a rigid division of events into male and female categories. The media are also a powerful source of gender socialization; starting very early in childhood, children’s books, television programs, movies, and music provide subtle and not-so-subtle messages about “masculine” and “feminine” behavior. Gender socialization is discussed in more depth in Chapter 11 (“Sex and Gender”).

In addition to gender-role socialization, we receive racial socialization throughout our lives. **Racial socialization** is the aspect of socialization that contains specific messages and practices concerning the nature of one’s racial or ethnic status as it relates to (1) personal and group identity, (2) intergroup and interindividual relationships, and (3) position in the social hierarchy. Racial socialization includes direct statements regarding race, modeling behavior (wherein a child imitates the behavior of a parent or other caregiver), and indirect activities such as exposure to specific objects, contexts, and environments that represent one’s racial–ethnic group (Thornton et al., 1990).

The most important aspects of our racial identity and attitudes toward other racial–ethnic groups are passed down in our families from generation to generation. As discussed in Chapter 3, some of the core values of U.S. society may support racist beliefs. As sociologist Martin Marger (1994: 97) notes, “Fear of, dislike for, and antipathy toward one group or another is learned in much the same way that people learn to eat with a knife or fork rather than with their bare hands or to respect others’ privacy in personal matters.” These beliefs can be transmitted in subtle and largely unconscious ways; they do not have to be taught directly or intentionally. Scholars have found that ethnic values and attitudes begin to crystallize among children as young as age four (Goodman, 1964; Porter, 1971). By this age, the society’s ethnic hierarchy has become apparent to the child (Marger, 2003). Some minority parents feel that racial social-
Do you believe that what this child is learning here will have an influence on her actions in the future? What other childhood experiences might offset early negative racial socialization?

Socialization Through the Life Course

Why is socialization a lifelong process? Throughout our lives, we continue to learn. Each time we experience a change in status (such as becoming a college student or getting married), we learn a new set of rules, roles, and relationships. Even before we achieve a new status, we often participate in anticipatory socialization—the process by which knowledge and skills are learned for future roles. Many societies organize social activities according to age and gather data regarding the age composition of the people who live in that society. For example, the U.S. Census Bureau gathers and maintains those data in the United States (see “Census Profiles: Age of the U.S. Population”). Some societies have distinct rites of passage, based on age or other factors, that publicly dramatize and validate changes in a person’s status. In the United States and other industrialized societies, the most common categories of age are infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood (often subdivided into young adulthood, middle adulthood, and older adulthood).

Infancy and Childhood

Some social scientists believe that a child’s sense of self is formed at a very early age and that it is difficult to change this self-perception later in life. Symbolic interactionists emphasize that during infancy and early childhood, family support and guidance are crucial to a child’s developing self-concept. In some families, children are provided with emotional warmth, feelings of mutual trust, and a sense of security. These families come closer to our ideal cultural belief that childhood should be a time of carefree play, safety, and freedom from economic, political, and sexual responsibilities. However, other families reflect the discrepancy between cultural ideals and reality—children grow up in gender socialization the aspect of socialization that contains specific messages and practices concerning the nature of being female or male in a specific group or society.

racial socialization the aspect of socialization that contains specific messages and practices concerning the nature of one’s racial or ethnic status.

anticipatory socialization the process by which knowledge and skills are learned for future roles.
a setting characterized by fear, danger, and risks that are created by parental neglect, emotional maltreatment, or premature economic and sexual demands (Knudsen, 1992).

Abused children often experience low self-esteem, an inability to trust others, feelings of isolationism and powerlessness, and denial of their feelings. However, the manner in which parental abuse affects children’s ongoing development is subject to much debate and uncertainty. For example, some scholars and therapists assert that the intergenerational hypothesis—the idea that abused children will become abusive parents—is valid, but others have found little support for this hypothesis (Knudsen, 1992).

According to the developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner (1990), mutual interaction with a caring adult—and preferably a number of nurturing adults—is essential for the child’s emotional, physical, intellectual, and social growth. However, Bronfenbrenner also states that at the macrosystem level, it is necessary for communities and the major economic, social, and political institutions of the entire society to provide the public policies and practices that support positive child-rearing activities on the part of families.

**Adolescence**

In industrialized societies, the adolescent (or teenage) years represent a buffer between childhood and adulthood. In the United States, no specific rites of passage exist to mark children’s move into adulthood; therefore, young people have to pursue their own routes to self-identity and adulthood (Gilmore, 1990). Anticipatory socialization is often associated with adolescence, during which many young people spend much of their time planning or being educated for future roles they hope to occupy. However, other adolescents (such as eleven- and twelve-year-old mothers) may have to plunge into adult responsibilities at this time. Adolescence is often characterized by emotional and social unrest. In the process of developing their own identities, some young people come into conflict with parents, teachers, and other authority figures who attempt to restrict their freedom. Adolescents may also find themselves caught between the demands of adulthood and their own lack of financial independence and experience in the job market. The experiences of individuals during adolescence vary according to race, class, and gender. Based on their family’s economic situation, some young people move directly into the adult world of work. However, those from upper-middle-class and upper-class families may ex-
tend adolescence into their late twenties or early thirties by attending graduate or professional school and then receiving additional advice and financial support from their parents as they start their own families, careers, or businesses.

**Adulthood**

One of the major differences between child socialization and adult socialization is the degree of freedom of choice. If young adults are able to support themselves financially, they gain the ability to make more choices about their own lives. In early adulthood (usually until about age forty), people work toward their own goals of creating meaningful relationships with others, finding employment, and seeking personal fulfillment. Of course, young adults continue to be socialized by their parents, teachers, peers, and the media, but they also learn new attitudes and behaviors. When we marry or have children, for example, we learn new roles as partners or parents. Adults often learn about fads and fashions in clothing, music, and language from their children. Parents in one study indicated that they had learned new attitudes and behaviors about drug use, sexuality, sports, leisure, and racial–ethnic issues from their college-age children (Peters, 1985).

**Workplace (occupational) socialization** is one of the most important types of adult socialization. Sociologist Wilbert Moore (1968) divided occupational socialization into four phases: (1) career choice, (2) anticipatory socialization (learning different aspects of the occupation before entering it), (3) conditioning and commitment (learning the “ups” and “downs” of the occupation and remaining committed to it), and (4) continuous commitment (remaining committed to the work even when problems or other alternatives may arise). This type of socialization tends to be most intense immediately after a person makes the transition from school to the workplace; however, this process continues throughout our years of employment. In the future, many people will experience continuous workplace socialization as a result of individuals having more than one career in their lifetime (Lefrançois, 1999).

Between the ages of forty and sixty-five, people enter middle adulthood, and many begin to compare their accomplishments with their earlier expectations. This is the point at which people either decide that they have reached their goals or recognize that they have attained as much as they are likely to achieve.

In older adulthood (age sixty-five and over), some people are quite happy and content; others are not. Erik Erikson noted that difficult changes in adult attitudes and behavior occur in the last years of life, when people experience decreased physical ability, lower prestige, and the prospect of death. Older adults in industrialized societies may experience **social devaluation**—wherein a person or group is considered to have less social value than other persons or groups. Social devaluation is especially acute when people are leaving roles that have defined their sense of social identity and provided them with meaningful activity.

It is important to note that not everyone goes through passages or stages of a life course at the same age. Sociologist Alice Rossi (1980) suggests that human experience is much more diverse than life-course models suggest. She also points out that young people growing up today live in a different world, with a different set of opportunities and problems, than did the young people of previous generations (Epstein, 1988). Rossi further suggests that women's and men's experiences are not identical throughout the life course and that the life course of women today is remarkably different from that of their mothers and grandmothers because of changing societal roles and expectations. Life-course patterns are strongly influenced by race/ethnicity and social class as well.

**Resocialization**

Resocialization is the process of learning a new and different set of attitudes, values, and behaviors from those in one's background and previous experience. Resocialization may be voluntary or involuntary. In either case, people undergo changes that are much more rapid and pervasive than the gradual adaptations that socialization usually involves.

**Voluntary Resocialization**

Resocialization is voluntary when we assume a new status (such as becoming a student, an employee, or a retiree) of our own free will. Sometimes, voluntary resocialization involves medical or psychological

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**social devaluation** a situation in which a person or group is considered to have less social value than other persons or groups.

**resocialization** the process of learning a new and different set of attitudes, values, and behaviors from those in one's background and previous experience.
treatment or religious conversion, in which case the person's existing attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors must undergo strenuous modification to a new regime and a new way of life. For example, resocialization for adult survivors of emotional/physical child abuse includes extensive therapy in order to form new patterns of thinking and action, somewhat like Alcoholics Anonymous and its twelve-step program, which has become the basis for many other programs dealing with addictive behavior (Parrish, 1990).

Involuntary Resocialization

Involuntary resocialization occurs against a person's wishes and generally takes place within a total institution—a place where people are isolated from the rest of society for a set period of time and come under the control of the officials who run the institution (Goffman, 1961a). Military boot camps, jails and prisons, concentration camps, and some mental hospitals are total institutions. Resocialization is a two-step process. First, people are totally stripped of their former selves—or depersonalized—through a degradation ceremony (Goffman, 1961a). For example, inmates entering prison are required to strip, shower, and wear assigned institutional clothing. In the process, they are searched, weighed, fingerprinted, photographed, and given no privacy even in showers and restrooms. Their official identification becomes not a name but a number. In this abrupt break from their former existence, they must leave behind their personal possessions and their family and friends. The depersonalization process continues as they are required to obey rigid rules and to conform to their new environment.

The second step in the resocialization process occurs when the staff at an institution attempts to build a more compliant person. A system of rewards and punishments (such as providing or withholding television or exercise privileges) encourages conformity to institutional norms.

Individuals respond to resocialization in different ways. Some people are rehabilitated; others become angry and hostile toward the system that has taken away their freedom. Although the assumed purpose of involuntary resocialization is to reform persons so that they will conform to societal standards of conduct after their release, the ability of total institutions to modify offenders' behavior in a meaningful manner has been widely questioned. In many prisons, for example, inmates may conform to the norms of the prison or of other inmates, but have little respect for those norms and the laws of the larger society.

Socialization in the Future

What will socialization be like in the future? The family is likely to remain the institution that most fundamentally shapes and nurtures people's personal values and self-identity. However, parents may increasingly feel overburdened by this responsibility, especially without high-quality, affordable child care. Some analysts have suggested that there may be an increase in known cases of child maltreatment and in the number of children who experience delayed psychosocial development, learning problems, and emotional and behavioral difficulties because of family problems (see Box 4.4 for suggestions on how to prevent child maltreatment).

A central value-oriented issue facing parents and teachers as they attempt to socialize children is the growing dominance of television and the Internet, which makes it possible for children to experience many things outside their own homes and schools and to communicate regularly with people around the world. It is very likely that socialization in the future will be vastly different in the world of global instant communication than it has been in the past.

People in military training are resocialized through extensive, grueling military drills and maneuvers. What new values and behaviors are learned in marching drills such as this?

[Image of military personnel]
You Can Make a Difference

Helping a Child Reach Adulthood

After Tina—one of your best friends—moves into a large apartment complex near her university, she keeps hearing a baby cry at all hours of the day and night. Although the crying is coming from the apartment next to Tina’s, she never sees anyone come or go from it. On several occasions, she knocks on the door, but no one answers. At first Tina tries to ignore the situation, but eventually she can’t sleep or study because the baby keeps crying. Tina decides she must take action and asks you, “What do you think I ought to do?” What advice could you give Tina?

Like Tina, many of us do not know if we should get involved in other people’s lives. We also do not know how to report child maltreatment. However, social workers and researchers suggest that bystanders must be willing to get involved in cases of possible abuse or neglect to save a child from harm by others. They also note the importance of people knowing how to report incidents of maltreatment:

- **Report child maltreatment.** Cases of child maltreatment can be reported to any social service or law enforcement agency.
- **Identify yourself to authorities.** Although most agencies are willing to accept anonymous reports, many staff members prefer to know your name, address, telephone number, and other basic information so that they can determine that you are not a self-interested person such as a hostile relative, ex-spouse, or vindictive neighbor.
- **Follow up with authorities.** Once an agency has validated a report of child maltreatment, the agency’s first goal is to stop the neglect or abuse of that child, whose health and safety are paramount concerns. However, intervention also has long-term goals. Sometimes, the situation can be improved simply by teaching the parents different values about child rearing or by pointing them to other agencies and organizations that can provide needed help. Other times, it may be necessary to remove the child from the parents’ custody and place the child in a foster home, at least temporarily. Either way, the situation for the child will be better than if he or she had been left in an abusive or neglectful home environment.

So the best advice for Tina—or anyone else who has reason to believe that child maltreatment is occurring—is to report it to the appropriate authorities. In most telephone directories, the number can be located in the government listings section. Here are some other resources for help:

- **Child Help USA,** which offers a 24-hour crisis hot line, national information, and referral network for support groups and therapists and for reporting suspected abuse: 6463 Independence Avenue, Woodland Hills, CA 91367. (800) 422-4453.
- **Child Welfare League of America,** a Washington, D.C., association of nearly 800 public and private nonprofit agencies, serves as an advocacy group for children who have experienced maltreatment: 440 First Street, NW, Suite 310, Washington, DC 20001-2085. (202) 638-2952.

On the Internet:

- The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children provides brochures about child safety and child protection upon request:
  
  [http://www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com)

It has been said that it takes a village to raise a child. In contemporary societies, it takes many people pulling together to help a child have a safe and happy childhood and a productive adulthood. Are there ways in which you, like the man in this photo, can help a young person in your community?
Chapter Review

**ThomsonNOW** is a one-stop study shop. Easy-to-use and online, it helps you maximize your study time and get the improved grade you want.

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• **What is socialization, and why is it important for human beings?**
Socialization is the lifelong process through which individuals acquire their self-identity and learn the physical, mental, and social skills needed for survival in society. The kind of person we become depends greatly on what we learn during our formative years from our surrounding social groups and social environment.

• **How much of our unique human characteristics comes from heredity and how much from our social environment?**
As individual human beings, we have unique identities, personalities, and relationships with others. Each of us is a product of two forces: (1) heredity, referred to as “nature,” and (2) the social environment, referred to as “nurture.” Whereas biology dictates our physical makeup, the social environment largely determines how we develop and behave.

• **Why is social contact essential for human beings?**
Social contact is essential in developing a self, or self-concept, which represents an individual’s perceptions and feelings of being a distinct or separate person. Much of what we think about ourselves is gained from our interactions with others and from what we perceive that others think of us.

• **What are the main social psychological theories on human development?**
According to Sigmund Freud, the self emerges from three interrelated forces: the id, the ego, and the superego. When a person is well adjusted, the three forces act in balance. Jean Piaget identified four cognitive stages of development; each child must go through each stage in sequence before moving on to the next one, although some children move through them faster than others.

• **How do sociologists believe that we develop a self-concept?**
According to Charles Horton Cooley’s concept of the looking-glass self, we develop a self-concept as we see ourselves through the perceptions of others. Our initial sense of self is typically based on how families perceive and treat us. George Herbert Mead suggested that we develop a self-concept through role-taking and learning the rules of social interaction. According to Mead, the self is divided into the “I” and the “me.” The “I” represents the spontaneous and unique traits of each person. The “me” represents the internalized attitudes and demands of other members of society.

• **What are the primary agents of socialization?**
The agents of socialization include the family, schools, peer groups, and the media. Our families, which transmit cultural and social values to us, are the most important agents of socialization in all societies, serving these functions: (1) procreating and socializing children, (2) providing emotional support, and (3) assigning social position. Schools primarily teach knowledge and skills but also have a profound influence on the self-image, beliefs, and values of children. Peer groups contribute to our sense of belonging and self-worth, and are a key source of information about acceptable behavior. The media function as socializing agents by (1) informing us about world events, (2) introducing us to a wide variety of people, and (3) providing an opportunity to live vicariously through other people’s experiences.

• **When does socialization end?**
Socialization is ongoing throughout the life course. We learn knowledge and skills for future roles through anticipatory socialization. Parents are socialized by their own children, and adults learn through workplace socialization. Resocialization is the process of learning new attitudes, values, and behaviors, either voluntarily or involuntarily.
Key Terms
agents of socialization 120
anticipatory socialization 129
gender socialization 128
generalized other 119
id 110
looking-glass self 116
peer group 122
racial socialization 128
resocialization 131
role-taking 117
self-concept 115
significant other 117
social devaluation 131
socialization 106
sociobiology 107
superego 111
total institution 132

Questions for Critical Thinking
1. Consider the concept of the looking-glass self. How do you think others perceive you? Do you think most people perceive you correctly?
2. What are your “I” traits? What are your “me” traits? Which ones are stronger?
3. What are some different ways that you might study the effect of toys on the socialization of children? How could you isolate the toy variable from other variables that influence children’s socialization?
4. Is the attempted rehabilitation of criminal offenders—through boot camp programs, for example—a form of socialization or resocialization?

Resources on the Internet
Chapter-Related Websites
The following websites have been selected for their relevance to the topics in this chapter. These sites are among the more stable, but please note that website addresses change frequently. For an updated list of chapter-related websites with URL links, please visit the Sociology in Our Times website (www.thomsonedu.com/sociology/kendall).

Social Psychology Index
http://www.trinity.edu/mkearl/socpsy.html#in
From Michael Kearl’s award-winning sociology web gateway, this page will link you to a number of resources on topics discussed in this chapter, including the nature versus nurture debate, the looking-glass self, agents of socialization, and much more.

Rob Kling Center for Social Informatics
http://rkcsi.indiana.edu
The Rob Kling Center for Social Informatics at Indiana University conducts research on the influence of technology and computerization on society. Its website will link you to journals, papers, workshops, and other resources that examine the social aspects of computerization.

The Kendall Companion Website
www.thomsonedu.com/sociology/kendall
Visit this book’s companion website, where you’ll find more resources to help you study and successfully complete course projects. Resources include quizzes, flash cards, and updated web links, as well as special features such as GSS Data and Census 2000 information that put powerful research results at your fingertips.