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SOCIOLOGY

A Whole New World

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INTRODUCING
SOCIOLOGY

A Whole New World

MADELEINE
COUSINEAU

MARQUETTE BOOKS LLC
SPOKANE, WASHINGTON

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Printed in the United States of America

CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Cousineau, Madeleine.

Introducing sociology: a whole new world / Cousineau, Madeleine.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references, glossary and index.

ISBN 978-0-922993-68-0 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Sociology -- World . 2. Sociology -- United States.

I. Cousineau, Madeleine. II. Title.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2008931556

Book Editor: David Demers

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Marquette Books LLC
5915 S. Regal St., Suite B-118
Spokane, Washington 99223
509-443-7057 (voice) / 509-448-2191 (fax)
books@marquettebooks.com / www.MarquetteBooks.com

TO PAULE VERDET,
TEACHER, MENTOR, AND FRIEND,
WHOSE EXAMPLE OF A LIFE OF LIMITLESS GENEROSITY
REMAINS AN ONGOING INSPIRATION

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PREFACE

There are many ways to teach and learn sociology. This book is brief by design, to allow for the greatest possible amount of freedom in its use. Its short length allows it to be combined with supplementary materials, whether library reserve articles, a series of monographs, or an anthology of readings. It may be used in a course taught in seminar format, with service learning, or with traditional lectures and discussions. Because of its simplicity and clarity, it may also be used outside of the context of a course by anyone who would like to know what sociology is about.

Special features intended to facilitate active learning appear as boxed items in each chapter. “Where am I in all this?” encourages readers to explore some aspect of the chapter that can be applied to their own experiences or observations. “On the Web” provides suggestions for enhancing the material in the chapter through the exploration of Internet sites. Because I have experienced the frustration of assigning Internet exercises from a textbook, only to discover that the links are dead, I have made the effort to use sites that are long standing and not likely to disappear soon. However, there is no way to guarantee this. If it does happen that any of the sites suggested in this book become inactive, I encourage readers to do their own Internet searches on related topics.

Writing this book has been a joyful experience that grew out of my enthusiasm for teaching sociology during the past thirty years. Although I have taught a considerable range of courses, the first course has always been my favorite one. Perhaps this is because it provides an opportunity for sharing the discovery of sociology with people who are encountering it for the first time and who do not yet know about the positive impact that

it can have on their lives. Some students come to their first sociology course with an interested curiosity, while others are indifferent or even resistant, believing that this discipline has nothing to offer them. It is a special joy to observe those students as they discover some topic in the course that awakens their interest, usually something that explains an aspect of their own life experiences. I wrote this book with those students in mind, as well as for other people who would like to know how sociology may help them to make sense of the world.

Another positive aspect of this writing experience was the encouragement that I received from colleagues and students who agreed to read the manuscript and who provided helpful feedback. These include—in addition to Paule Verdet, to whom the book is dedicated—Wayne Alexander, Thomas Birks, Susan Farrell, Britta Fischer, Mark Heyman, Sarah Holmgren, Jack Levin, Karen Miranda, and Frances Fox Piven. My husband, Jonathan Campbell, was extremely helpful in a variety of ways, from critical feedback on the manuscript and patient proofreading to doing far more than his share of cooking and housecleaning. Without his enthusiastic support it would have been difficult to get this book done. But it would not have even gotten started without strong encouragement from David Demers, Editor-in-Chief of Marquette Books. Writing a brief paperback text in introductory sociology was a longtime dream, and I am deeply grateful to Dr. Demers for his tremendous support in helping me to realize that dream, as well his sensitivity to my concern about keeping the book affordable, his willingness to allow me a great deal of input into the production process, and his openness to frequent communication. This has been my most pleasant publication experience.

It is a given that I am responsible for the final content. However, the contributions of all these people were essential in assuring that the scholarship, the relevance, and, most of all, the readability of this book would justify offering it to teachers of sociology as an effective means of communicating the essence of our discipline to present and future generations of students.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCING SOCIOLOGY

Studying sociology is unnatural. It demands a change in our thinking, stretching our imaginations beyond what feels normal to us. Sociological thinking requires us to let go of a basic assumption that is dear to the hearts of many of us—that everything is up to the individual, and that we are all independent of one another. It challenges us to think again, to see connections that we may not have seen before, and to acknowledge that each of us both influences the world around us and experiences that world’s influence on us. It leads us to question what we have always believed to be true. But it is well worth the effort, because studying sociology enables us to discover a whole new world and to get a better understanding of our own life experiences in the context of that world.

If you are willing to enter into this unnatural state, a state in which you will learn to think in a different way, I can offer you an interesting adventure. And there are no strings attached. When you finish reading this book, or when you complete the course for which it is assigned, you will be free to go back to your old way of thinking. But you will also have the option of using the new tools—the new ways of dealing with the world in which you live—that sociology promises to give you.

SOCIOLOGY AND OTHER WAYS OF THINKING

Sociology and Philosophy

Sociology stands in contrast to three other ways of thinking: philosophy, psychology, and common sense. Many issues that are relevant

to sociology were first raised and discussed by philosophers. For example, how is a society possible? Are human beings good or evil, social or anti-social? Is society helpful or harmful to people? How would the perfect society be structured? How do societies maintain order? How do they change? However, an important difference between philosophy and sociology is that philosophers work mainly with ideas, while sociologists and other social scientists relate ideas to research in what we sometimes call “the real world.” By that we mean the reality that exists outside of books and discussions. Studying this reality means going beyond the library or the classroom—unless we are specifically studying human behavior in libraries and classrooms—to discover what people actually do or think in concrete situations. Then we organize our findings and look for general patterns.

Sociology and Psychology

A second way of thinking that may be contrasted with sociology is psychology. Psychologists generally study people’s experiences in relation to what is within themselves and their social environments—their families, their friends, and other people with whom they frequently interact. In contrast, sociologists relate people’s experiences to the larger societal context, especially economic, political, and educational systems. These differences are visible even in those aspects of psychology and sociology that are closest to the borderline between these two fields—that is, social psychology and the interactionist approach within sociology. Within these subfields there have been numerous studies of race and prejudice.

In studying racism, psychologists examine the processes of conditioning and social learning that lead people to be prejudiced. They have noted the importance of certain experiences related to these processes, including contact with people who are different from oneself, parental example, and media exposure (Allport 1954; Miranda 2005). Sociologists, on the other hand, are likely to call attention to social-structural factors (also called institutional factors) that place people in situations of positive or negative contact, and to analyze the whole system of unequal societal relations. Individuals may get away with acts of

discrimination, and even murder, if a racist social system enables them to engage in this behavior without punishment (Levin and Levin 1980; Levin and McDevitt 2002). A racist social system also enables an employer to pay lower salaries to people of color than to whites, which results in higher profits for the company. The higher profits are in effect a reward for discrimination. In this type of situation, sociologists define the problem not in terms of individual prejudice, but rather in terms of the unequal opportunity structure that characterizes the society as a whole. In fact, sociologists have noted that people may even engage in discriminatory practices without necessarily being personally prejudiced (Merton 1948; Levin and Levin 1980), as would be the case with the employer who discriminates for the sake of financial gain.

When we give this kind of explanation, it is not to excuse discrimination. Instead it means we are focusing on what needs to be changed in the structure of society in order to make it unprofitable for employers to discriminate or in order to create environments in which contact between people of different races will be generally positive. We will come back to this subject in Chapter 6.

This description of the differences between psychology and sociology shows that, while psychology is helpful in providing an understanding of attitudes and motivations that exist within the individual, including those that are influenced by the social environment, sociology calls attention to the system of rules and rewards that are part of the larger social structure and that provide the societal context for human behavior. When students' education includes both psychology and sociology, they are able to gain a more complete understanding of human experience than they would learn from each field by itself, because human beings are both individuals and members of a society.

Sociology and Common Sense

Then there is common sense. People usually assume that common sense represents what everyone knows, and so it must be true. We sometimes hear people say, "Sociology is nothing more than common

sense.” This comment suggests that, because everyone knows it, there is no point of studying it. Therefore, sociology has no right to exist.

Obviously people who write books about sociology must think that it has a right to exist, but the reader has the right to know why. Common sense refers to the ideas that most people in a society accept, as though they were absolute truths that applied to everyone in the world. However, by comparing the beliefs characteristic of two different societies, we may see how this is not necessarily the case. For example, in the United States it is a common practice among professionals and business managers to change employers one or more times over the course of their lives. Although their co-workers and supervisors may be sorry to see them go (or not!), they usually consider it to be a good idea for someone to be moving on to accept a better position. Americans consider it common sense that people should look out for their individual interests as they climb the ladder of success. This attitude would be less common in Japan, however, where about 20 percent of the workforce, including many managers and professionals, has lifetime employment. Rather than leaving a job to go after a better opportunity, these employees usually prefer to advance in their careers by being loyal to a single company.

Sometimes common sense turns out to be false, which we may discover with the wisdom of hindsight. Let us look at some beliefs of 150 years ago. At that time, many Americans considered it acceptable to have black people as slaves, as though they were less human than white people. Today most Americans no longer accept that idea. Back then, there also were many people who believed that women should not receive much education, because that would make them unable to produce children. Even a prominent sociologist of that era, Herbert Spencer (1897), expressed this idea, which shows that sociologists are not always immune to the common sense notions of their times. Today we know that, although some women may make the decision to postpone motherhood until they complete an advanced degree, academic study is not in itself an effective contraceptive. These two examples enable us to see that the common sense of the past was not always true.

The main difference between sociology and common sense is not that

sociologists are always right, but that we test our theories by means of empirical research—that is, though the systematic study of what happens in the real world. Examples of present-day beliefs that do not hold up under empirical testing include the ideas that the death penalty serves as a deterrent to violent crime, that all women on public assistance have large numbers of children, and that a strong welfare state makes people lazy and unproductive. If we design studies in a way that is honest and that enables us to put aside our preconceived ideas, we may gain a clear understanding of these issues. For example, we could learn about the effectiveness of the death penalty by looking at FBI crime statistics and comparing homicide rates in states that have capital punishment with those that do not. We could learn about the range of family size among recipients of Temporary Aid to Needy Families by studying public assistance records. We could investigate whether a welfare state makes people lazy and unproductive by comparing the academic and professional achievements of successful people in the United States to those of their counterparts in England, Germany, and other European countries in which the governments provide large subsidies for higher education, health care, and a variety of forms of assistance to families and individuals of all social classes.

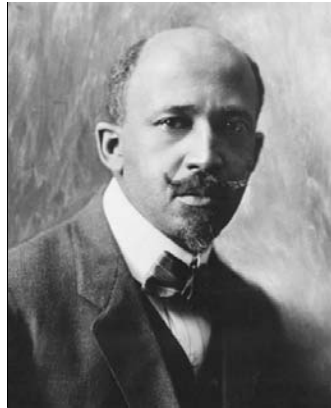
WAYS OF DOING SOCIOLOGY

Sociologists use several research methods to explore these topics and others. These methods include:

- *survey research*—the design and administration of questionnaires with fixed-choice answers to a large number of people and the subjecting of the results to mathematical calculations;
- *secondary data analysis*—the use of data from the census or other public sources, as well as from studies that have been done by other researchers;
- *participant observation*—spending time becoming closely acquainted with an organization or a community and taking notes on everything that one sees and hears;

- *in-depth interviewing*—soliciting detailed information from people by means of open-ended questions and active listening techniques;
- *content analysis*—the systematic study of documents, which may include anything from newspapers to religious hymns, in order to discover patterns that have sociological meaning;
- *demographic mapping*—the study of a neighborhood in order to learn the locations of households with a variety of characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, occupation, and the presence of children, the elderly, and single people;
- *historical analysis*—the study of documents, diaries, and other records from the past in order to discover patterns in people’s lives and to understand how those patterns may have an impact on contemporary societies;
- *comparative (or cross-national) analysis*—the application of any of these methods to the study of more than one society, in order to discover the consequences that variations in particular social factors will produce in different contexts.

Sociologists often combine several of these methods in one research project. For example, W. E. B. Du Bois, an early African American sociologist, combined participant observation, demographic mapping, in-depth interviewing, and statistical analysis into one massive study. He published the results in 1899 in his book, *The Philadelphia Negro*. This book represented the first major piece of empirical research conducted by an American sociologist.



W. E. B. Du Bois (1868-1963)

THE WHOLE PICTURE AND THE INDIVIDUAL

Good research is usually linked in some way with social theory—that is, a set of ideas about how societies work. About a hundred years ago, a French sociologist named Emile Durkheim, in his book about sociological method, made a theoretical statement that is fundamental to sociology. He wrote, “A whole is not identical with the sum of its parts” (Durkheim 1895:102).



Emile Durkheim (1858-1917)

What he meant was that societies are more than a collection of individuals. People frequently ask, “But isn’t society made up of individuals?” Durkheim would have explained that when people come together they create something that goes beyond each of them as individuals. This “something” includes groups, organizations, communities, social institutions, and other social units. These social units then take on a life of their own and can provide advantages or disadvantages for people, as well as make demands on the very people who created them.

A number of years ago this sociological theory was brought home to me in a very concrete and somewhat painful way. I started a human rights project and organized a steering committee to help run it. One evening during a meeting, I presented an idea for the use of some of our funds to the committee. I thought it was a very good idea and assumed that everyone would go along with it. But the treasurer of the project, who happened to be a former student of mine, opposed my idea and persuaded everyone else to do so as well. I had to accept the decision of the committee that I had organized. At that moment I understood all too well what Durkheim meant about social structures taking on a life of their own, although my personal feeling at the time was that I had created a monster.

This is only one example of the countless ways that individuals interact with social structures. In all of our actions, great and small, we have an impact on our society, at the same time that it influences us. Most

of our actions contribute to maintaining existing social and political structures. For example, if you are reading this book in connection with a course, you are cooperating with the requirements of your professor, as you do when you attend class, study for tests, do written assignments, participate when the professor initiates a discussion, cooperate with interactive activities, and take notes during a lecture. The professor also helps to maintain the existing structure by showing up for classes, preparing lectures and activities, selecting appropriate readings, and grading tests, papers, and other assignments. This observance of regular procedures by students and professors helps to maintain the structure of higher education. Likewise, the observance of regular procedures by people in a variety of situations contributes to the maintaining of other social structures.

In addition to helping to maintain the existing social order, you may also be a participant in change. For example, if you are attending a college that is coeducational and multiracial, this is different from what many students were doing fifty years ago, when more colleges were single-sex and fewer people of color were attending. You may also choose to get involved in a direct effort to try to bring about change, such as by participating in a public demonstration for a cause that you believe in.

SOCIAL ORDER AND SOCIAL CHANGE

An Early Theorist of Social Order

The first sociologist who observed the rules and behaviors that help to maintain social order was Harriet Martineau, a British researcher who traveled to the United States in 1834. She was the first person known to do empirical research in sociology. Not only did Martineau conduct a very thorough study of American society, observing and interviewing people from many different walks of life, such as political leaders and prisoners (Martineau 1837). But also before arriving in this country, while still on the ship crossing the Atlantic Ocean, she wrote the notes that would become the first book on doing sociology, called *How to Observe Morals*

and Manners (Martineau 1838). Despite the seemingly quaint title, this book was actually a manual in research methodology. The term “morals” referred to social norms, or rules, and “manners” to the behavior that reflected those norms. In addition, Martineau’s method included suspending one’s judgment, questioning the obvious, making careful observations, and being as objective as possible. She wrote that researchers must always remember that they are studying “things,” which meant phenomena that are out there in the world, like objects, directly observable, rather than imaginings in one’s own subjective mind.



Harriet Martineau (1802-1886)

However, Martineau did not believe that objectivity required shutting off one’s sense of justice or sympathy with human suffering. After completing her careful, systematic observations, she expressed criticism of some aspects of American society, including the enslavement of black people, inequality between men and women, and poor wages and working conditions in factories.

Agents of Change

Martineau’s approach suggests that, in addition to studying sources of order in a society, such as norms and the behavior that conforms to those norms, sociologists may also advocate change. This view was evident in the work of Jane Addams, an early American sociologist who not only did research and wrote a number of books, but also campaigned for an end to child labor and founded one of the nation’s first settlement houses to reach out to poor people in Chicago. Sociologists who represent the change-oriented tradition are still around today. They include Frances Fox Piven, a recent president of the American Sociological Association, whose numerous books and articles both analyze and support the efforts

of ordinary people to bring about major transformations in their society (see Piven 2006; Piven and Cloward 1977).

Sometimes people may feel overwhelmed by social problems and find it hard to believe that they can do anything to improve the world. There is a wonderful story that demonstrates what one person can do if that person is open to working for change and receives support from others who share that belief. One evening a little more than fifty years ago, a seamstress in Montgomery, Alabama, whose name was Rosa Parks, completed her day's work and got on a bus to go home. The bus was divided into seats for white people at the front and seats for black people at the back. There was a sign that separated these two sections, but the driver could move the sign to provide more seats for whites. As the bus began to fill and all the seats at the front became occupied, the driver placed the sign behind Mrs. Parks and told her to stand. She was tired, not so much in the physical sense as tired of conforming to an unjust situation. She refused to move and was arrested.

Rosa Parks was not the first African American to be arrested for refusing to give up a bus seat, and her individual action might have been forgotten, just like the actions of others before her. But this time the social context was different. In that same city the Rev. Martin Luther King was working in religious ministry in the black community—a ministry in which people took seriously the biblical command for social justice. Dr. King was acquainted with Mrs. Parks, who was a member of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). This organization was looking for a test case to challenge the



The refusal by Rosa Parks to yield her seat on a bus to a white person helped to mobilize the Civil Rights Movement. Dr. Martin Luther King is in the background of this picture.

“back-of-the-bus” law and quickly spread the news of her arrest throughout the community. When people received the news, they immediately responded. Within twenty-four hours the Montgomery bus boycott had begun. For a full year no black people rode the buses. Mrs. Parks’ refusal to move to the back of the bus is considered to be an early key event in the Civil Rights Movement.

A SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

Most of us will not see such dramatic results from our individual actions. But we do contribute, at least in small ways, to the shaping of our social environment and are also influenced by forces in that environment. An awareness of our connectedness to the social world is called a sociological imagination. This way of thinking was best described by an American sociologist, C. Wright Mills (1959), who pointed out that people are not usually conscious of the connection of their individual experiences to history and social structure. We often go through our everyday lives feeling trapped by various demands and restrictions, without understanding how those traps are created. But Mills had great hopes for sociology. He believed that, if people would catch on to that way of thinking, they could find ways out of their traps. Instead many people struggle against them, thinking that the causes of their problems are purely individual, or if they *are* outside of the individual, that there is no solution.

Mills distinguished between **personal troubles**, which are problems that people see as entirely individual, and **public issues**, which are caused by something in society. He pointed out how the two are often connected. For example, if one person in a large city is unemployed, that is the person’s own individual problem. To help him or her out of the problem, we need to ask what the person’s talents and strengths are and what character defects make it hard for this person to hold down a job. Solutions may include job training, education, contacts with prospective employers, finding a mentor, employment counseling, psychotherapy, or some combination of any of these.

ON THE WEB

www.asanet.org

Visit this Web site to learn about the American Sociological Association. Follow links to obtain information about the organization, as well as many other topics, including careers in sociology, research, and the annual meeting.

www.cwrightmills.org

This site, maintained by the son and two daughters of C. Wright Mills, contains a photo gallery, as well as information about several of his books.

www.rosaparks.org

Learn about the life of Rosa Parks and about the organization that carries on her work.

On the other hand, if the rate of unemployment is very high, being out of work may not be the fault of the individual. Perhaps a company that provided many jobs in a particular geographic area may have closed down or laid off a large number of workers. Today we see jobs lost through automation, downsizing, and the movement of production to countries where wages are low. Cuts in government spending may cause job losses in public works, human services, health care, education, police and fire departments, and other areas that are supported by public funds. These factors are beyond the immediate control of the individual. When people apply for jobs during a period of high unemployment, they find themselves in competition with hundreds of other applicants, and only one of these will get each available job. Because the source of the problem is beyond the level of the individual, solutions must also go beyond that level, such as tax breaks for companies that contribute jobs to a community, or organized pressure from citizens to change government spending priorities.

Mills also talked about war, a public issue, and showed how it creates personal troubles for individuals as well. They may interrupt their education, postpone getting married, or become disabled in combat. People may become widowed or orphaned when a spouse or parent is killed, or they may lose a son, daughter, brother, sister, or close friend. Other people may gain advantages, for example, if their businesses prosper because they sell products to the military, or if they find work in a defense industry, or if they return from the war with body and mind intact and attend college with the help of government benefits.

By means of examples like these, Mills showed how we are connected with society. He also showed our connection to history, insofar as there are various advantages and disadvantages that people experience according to the time when they are living. Today, for example, many students find it difficult to pay for college. They may have to work long hours at a job and struggle to find time to study. They may accumulate large loans and have to work for many years after graduation to pay them. It was easier to pay for an education in the 1960s. The tuition at state colleges and universities was much lower than it is now because both the state and federal governments paid a larger part of the cost of higher education. At the same time, private universities were also receiving considerable funding from the federal government, enabling them to charge less for tuition than they must charge at the present time. In addition, scholarships and grants were plentiful. However, it was much harder to get into a good college at that time than it would be twenty years later. Because of the increase in the birthrate after World War II (the “baby boom”), the number of people applying to college in the 1960s was unusually high. So we see that in each time period there are both advantages and difficulties for individuals.

Today many people make take for granted that the accumulation of large student loans is a “normal” part of getting an education. The previous paragraph suggests that this was not true in the past. Neither is it true everywhere in the world. In most other modern industrial nations and in many developing countries as well, education is heavily subsidized by governments, and so the costs are much lower on average than in the United States. However, in some countries, there are so many applicants

WHERE AM I IN ALL THIS?

Think about something that you experience as a “personal trouble,” as described by C. Wright Mills. Can you connect it to something in the larger society, in other words a “public issue”? If not, try approaching this question from the opposite point. Think about a public issue—for example, something in the news—and describe how it affects you personally.

to every university that it can be difficult for even good students to get in. As a result, people from other countries who are able to pay the tuition at colleges and universities in the United States frequently send their sons and daughters to study here.

These examples of the effects of social structure and history on people’s lives are not intended to suggest that individuals have no free will. What they do show is that each of us makes our choices within a specific social context, and that context provides both opportunities and limitations. The study of sociology helps us to understand how those opportunities and limitations come about and how we may develop ways of responding to them.

DEFINING SOCIOLOGY

Now that we have explored some aspects of sociological thinking, it may be meaningful to offer a **definition of sociology**. It is the science that seeks to understand people’s behavior and ideas in relation to units that are larger than the individual. This definition is only one way of explaining this field of study. You may look for definitions in other textbooks or in a dictionary of sociology. Your professor may give a definition in class. At some point you should also try to come up with one in your own words. Why go through all this trouble, you may ask, instead of simply memorizing one definition? Because by thinking of the same concept in

different words, by playing with the words, by turning the concept upside-down and inside-out, you will be making it your own. It will make sense to you, and you will be more likely to remember it. You may consider doing this with all the definitions found in this book.

Now let us go back to the definition of sociology, beginning with the last phrase, “units larger than the individual.” Such units include groups, organizations, bureaucracies, government, business, education, the mass media, social classes, races, ethnic groups, and social movements. These units will be discussed in the various chapters of this book.

Another phrase is “people’s behavior and ideas.” This means that sociology is concerned not only with what people do, but also with what they think, feel, and experience.

Between the two phrases mentioned above we find “in relation to.” This part of the definition is especially important because it suggests that the influence between people and the larger units is reciprocal—meaning that it goes both ways. We are not robots programmed by society. We have an influence on our society as well, but that influence is not purely individual. It results from the combination of our actions with those of other people. As we saw earlier, everything that we do in our everyday lives serves either to contribute to keeping society as it is or to changing it.

When we go to school, go to work, pay our taxes, and do other things expected of us, we are helping to maintain society. Another way of saying this is that we are giving our consent to the existing social arrangements. When we participate in a new pattern, such as sending our children to racially integrated schools, we are participating in change. Our influence on society is most visible when we deliberately join together with other people to withdraw our consent. We may see this happening, for example, when people get involved in a social movement, whether they do this by marching in the streets or writing a letter to an elected official. As we will see in Chapter 8, some movements are attempts to make changes in society, such as movements for racial or gender equality, for prison reform, or for an end to war. Other movements are attempts to keep society as it is or to reverse changes, such as movements against school

desegregation, against abortion, or against gay marriage.

Now we are left with the beginning of the definition: “The science that seeks to understand.” *Understand?* But aren’t scientists supposed to experiment, measure, and predict outcomes? That is true in physics and chemistry, but sociology cannot match the precision of those sciences. We are dealing with human beings, not molecules. Human behavior does not usually fit into exact categories. Also, people have views of their own, and if researchers do not try to understand those views, people may not cooperate with them.

Actually, it is a good thing that we cannot predict human behavior with perfect precision. If that were possible, a sociologist, or a government leader who hired a sociologist, could manipulate everyone’s behavior at all times. So if sociology were as precise as physics, we might lose our freedom. However, this absence of perfect precision in sociology does not mean that we cannot learn anything about human behavior. There *are* patterns in what people think and do, and we can make careful generalizations about those patterns.

Stereotypes and Generalizations

In relation to that last statement, it is important to emphasize the word “careful.” A generalization is not the same as a stereotype. A **stereotype** is the classification of all people in a particular category as having the same trait, whether that trait is positive (good at music or good at sports) or negative (stupid or lazy). In other words, one would be stereotyping if one were to say, “All those people are like that.”

A study of stereotypes about athletes on a college campus revealed that some students held the view that athletes are stupid, in other words, the “dumb jock” stereotype. Furthermore, because of another stereotype that blacks are better than whites at sports, many of these students assumed black “jocks” to be even “dumber.” Although the author of the study provides data to demonstrate that these stereotypes are not true, he notes that many people still believe them (Sailes 1996).

In contrast to stereotyping, a **scientific generalization** is a statement, based on evidence from empirical research, about what the majority of

people will do or experience in a given situation. To continue with the example of college athletes, we might discover through careful research that at colleges where black students have been recruited specifically to play a sport, the pressure to excel at that sport may make it difficult for these students to devote enough attention to their academic work so that they will be able to graduate (see Purdy et al., 1982). This kind of generalization provides an explanation that is very different from the above-mentioned stereotype.



A sociologist might challenge stereotypes about black college athletes by investigating the external pressures to which these students may be subjected.

Other Important Concepts

In each chapter of this book you will find concepts and definitions specific to the topic being introduced. However, there are some general concepts that apply to sociology as a whole. You have already read the definition of sociology given above, as well as a discussion of Mills's concept of **sociological imagination**. Here is a more specific definition of that concept: The ability to understand the experiences of individuals in relation to the times when they are living and their positions in the social structure.

One way of making this definition more meaningful is to imagine how some specific aspect of your life—getting an education, getting a job, getting married (or choosing not to marry), having children (or choosing not to)—would have been different if you had been born a century ago. Where were your ancestors living at that time? If you had been alive then, is it likely that you would have gone to college? Or, if you were a man, would you have been already married and living on a farm or working at a trade? If you were a woman, would you have already had children?

This kind of exercise helps us to notice how the times when we are living influence our individual life experiences. As for social structure, one very visible aspect of that is inequality. So you might also try to imagine how some specific aspect of your life would have been different if you had been born into a much wealthier family. What would be the advantages and disadvantages? Then try to imagine what your life would have been like if you had been born into a much poorer family. If you think that your family is as poor as an American family could be, then imagine having been born into the poorest class in a developing country. Under those circumstances, it is not likely that you would be attending college, even part-time.

Another important general concept is **social system**. This refers to a set of elements of society that depend on one another and that may be understood as a unit. For example, a family may be described as a social system, because the elements within it (individual people) depend on one another. The very fact that we have a word for this collection of people, a family, shows that it is some kind of unit. A group of friends may also constitute a social system. So may an organization, such as a college. But this now brings us to a level where the interdependent elements are no longer individual people, because a college is composed of departments—admissions, financial aid, the president’s office, physical plant, food service, library, computing services, and all the academic divisions. A government is an even larger system. It has within it many sub-units, which are further divided into other sub-units. So now we see that a social system may be very large and that its elements may contain elements of their own. One of the largest social systems is a society, but even that system can be studied as an element within a larger unit. Today many sociologists analyze the whole world as a system and examine the interdependence among the societies that constitute its elements.

The general concept of **social structure** mentioned above may be defined as the way that a particular social system is put together. For example, we may analyze the specific structure of a social system, such as a family. It may consist of two parents and two children or a single parent with one or more children. The children may enter the family through birth

or adoption. A grandparent or other relative may also be part of the household. There may be different expectations of male and female members of the family.

This concept of social structure is also useful for distinguishing sociological analysis from an individualistic viewpoint. When we say that something is **structural**, we mean that the cause of it originates in the society, rather than in the actions of particular individuals. For example, if we say that poverty is structural, this is the opposite of blaming an individual for being poor. Although we acknowledge that some individuals make bad choices that lead them to have financial difficulties, sociologists do not usually explain the overall rate of poverty in this way. We study the ways that systems of wealth, power, and privilege develop over time, the processes by which certain sectors of the population acquire the largest share of the wealth, how they maintain that share and pass it on to subsequent generations, and how they maintain the power to determine the shares that other sectors of the population will receive. We also look at the wages and salaries that are paid for various occupations and compare that compensation to the cost of living. Finally, we examine the opportunity structure—including access to good jobs, education, housing, legal services, and health care—to learn about the possibilities available to people for improving or maintaining the position into which they were born.

The concept of social structure, along with social system and sociological imagination, helps us to understand how each individual connects with something larger than himself or herself, and gives some idea of what sociology is about. These concepts provide a framework for the material that will be presented in the rest of this book.

Key Points

- Sociology provides a way of thinking that goes beyond the individual.

- It places the experiences of the individual in a larger social context.
- It challenges notions of “common sense” by means of careful research.
- It shows how the whole is more than the sum of its parts.
- It enables people to see both how they influence the social structure and how they are influenced by it.

Key Concepts

scientific generalization	social system	sociology
social structure	sociological imagination	stereotype

Study Questions

1. How is sociology different from common sense? Can you think of something that many people believe and that could be tested through sociological research?
2. What did Harriet Martineau and W. E. B. Du Bois contribute to sociology? How was their work especially significant in terms of “firsts”?
3. What do you think is the point of the story about Rosa Parks? What do her actions and the results of her actions show about the relationship of an individual to her or his society?
4. How is a scientific generalization different from a stereotype? What do you think makes it easy to believe stereotypes? What can people do to counter some especially harmful stereotypes, such as those related to race, nationality, or disability?



(Photo by Tevaprapas Makklay)

Chapter 2

CULTURE AND SOCIALIZATION

Do human beings have instincts? Most people would say yes. They are likely to mention the impulse for survival, people's desire for sex, a mother's knowledge of how to take care of her child, and the ability of anyone to find food and eat it. But let us stop to consider a scientific definition of **instinct**: behavior that is inborn and complex and that does not vary within the species. This is the definition used by biologists, sociologists, and anthropologists.

Let us take a look at each of the four parts of this definition:

- *An instinct is a behavior.* This means that it is something that someone actually does and may be observed. By this definition, having a feeling about something would not be considered an instinct, because a feeling is not a behavior and because one person cannot directly observe another's feelings. One can only imagine someone's feelings on the basis of what the other person says or does.
- *An instinct is inborn, not learned.* Can you remember many specific details of your everyday life before the age of five? A good deal of learning went on during those first few years of your life. If you cannot remember the process of learning how to speak, how to walk, how to drink from a cup, or many other behaviors that you now take for granted, those behaviors may feel as though they were instinctive. However, if you learned a particular behavior, it is not an instinct.
- *An instinct is complex.* If someone strokes the cheek of a newborn infant, and the infant turns and sucks whatever is there, that is a

reflex. It is a simple behavior, not a complex one. Drives, such as hunger and sex, are also simple. Anything that can be classified as a reflex or a drive does not qualify as an instinct.

- *An instinct does not vary within the species.* For example, birds of each species are consistent in their complex behaviors. All robins get their food the same way, build their nests the same way, mate the same way, and feed their young the same way. Humans, on the other hand, show a great deal of variety in the ways we get our food, build our homes, make love, and take care of children. Although there are some consistent patterns within a society in the ways that people do these things, these patterns will be very different from the customs of another



Robins all build their nests the same way and care for their young the same way. Unlike humans, their actions are directed by instinct. (Photo by Anthony Marquette)

society. Because all humans are of the same species (*homo sapiens*), an instinctive behavior would have to be the same in all societies.

HOW HUMANS SURVIVE: CULTURE

On the basis of these four criteria—behavioral, inborn, complex, and invariable within the species—sociologists conclude that humans do not have instincts. But then how do we survive? We spend our whole lives learning.

This learning begins at birth and goes at great speed for the first five years of life. So by the time we are five years old, we already “know” what is considered to be “normal” behavior for men and for women. We know how to use the toilet. We know how to eat. We look at our parents and know that daddies are bigger than mommies, unless we have a tall mother, or no mother, or no father, or two mothers, or two fathers. What we learn during those first five years forms the basis for what we define as normal, right, and true.

Much of what we learn is shared by other people who live in our society. So these beliefs and ways of behaving are not purely individual, but are collective. We call these shared learnings **culture**. A formal definition of culture is the set of beliefs, values, attitudes, and norms that prescribe the behavior expected of groups, communities, or whole societies.

VALUES, NORMS, AND SANCTIONS

Two important terms in this definition are values and norms. **Values** are general ideas about what is good, true, and desirable that are shared by people in a group, community, or society. Note that values are *general*. They do not give us specific information about what to do in particular circumstances, but rather provide broad principles, such as freedom or generosity. **Norms**, on the other hand, are *specific rules* for behavior that are linked to consequences. For example, pay your taxes or you will have to pay a fine.

Folkways and Mores

This mention of consequences leads into a discussion of two types of norms whose violation can produce very different kinds of reactions. The first sociologist to suggest this classification was William Graham Sumner (1906), who called these two types of cultural norms folkways and mores. **Folkways** are a society's common customs, collective habits that satisfy everyday needs—such as ways of consuming food, selecting clothing, keeping one's body clean, and interacting with other people. If someone violates these norms, our reactions may range from curiosity (“They eat *that*?” or “What on earth are they wearing?”) to revulsion (“Ugh! He stinks!” or “What a revolting lack of manners!”). However, we would be unlikely to demand that someone be arrested, ostracized, or put to death for violating such norms. On the other hand, there are other norms whose violation might lead people to think about excluding someone from their community or even executing that person.

Sumner called the rules of behavior that generate that type of sentiment **mores** (pronounced like “morays”). These are norms that people connect to the well being of the society as a whole. They consider them to be facts; that is, something they take for granted as absolute reality. To violate mores constitutes what people define as a serious threat to their collective way of life, and the consequences tend to be harsh. Examples of mores include the maintenance of human life and the protection of those defined as weak, such as children, as well as beliefs about normal sexuality and, most recently, about homeland security. As a result people tend to have especially strong negative reactions toward murderers, child molesters, and anyone defined as a terrorist.

Folkways and mores may change as social conditions evolve, although mores generally change more slowly than folkways. A historical view is helpful for finding an instance of a change in mores. For example, during the Middle Ages many people believed that the killing of a close relative would have to be avenged by killing the killer or one of his close relatives in order to preserve the family honor. In our present-day society such an avenger would likely face a charge of murder.

The Relationship of Norms to Values

Norms are closely related to values, as the following examples will illustrate. In general, Americans like to choose their own partners and to decide whether they will get married or not. We may or may not consult our parents or other relatives for advice on the choice of a mate—usually not. We also like to decide for ourselves how to make a living and what to do with the money that we earn. We expect to share it with our spouse and children, if we have any. We do not feel obliged to share it with anyone else, although we may choose to do so. In fact, we are often cautious about offering money to friends or relatives in need, so as not to insult them. Americans generally have an attitude of independence, and do not like to admit that they cannot earn what they need. So rather than offering an outright gift of a large sum of money, we may offer a loan, and later cancel it if the individual has difficulty with repayment.



In India many young people still accept marriages arranged by their families.
(Photo by Jaisingh Rathore)

These norms about marriage and money are not the same all over the world. In India, for example, many young people still accept marriages that are arranged by their parents. And in many cultures of Africa and the Middle East, people who earn a considerable amount of money know that their relatives expect them to share it. At the same time, people who have money can expect that, if they become needy in the future, their relatives will share what they have with them.

Another set of American norms is evident in the way we ride elevators. You may have noticed that as people get on an elevator they press their own buttons, face forward, stare at their shoes or their fingernails or at the lighted numbers above the door, and stand fairly evenly spaced away from everyone else. People who are having a conversation while waiting for the elevator are likely to stop talking or lower their voices as they get on. As the elevator fills, there is a specific set of movements that occurs. It is almost like a dance. Those already on the inside rearrange themselves to accommodate the newcomers, usually

without thinking about it. If they then find themselves standing closer to some people than to others, they make minor movements to establish more or less equal distances. As more people get on, everyone shifts again, standing even closer than before but still maintaining equal spaces. Once it becomes nearly impossible to maintain any space at all, many people begin compressing their bodies, standing with their feet closer together and folding their arms or pressing them to their sides. They also compensate for the lack of physical distance by substituting social distance. They do this by avoiding talking with anyone or looking at anyone—hence the tendency to stare at the indicator lights, even when they are broken.¹ As the elevator reaches the higher floors and begins to empty, people relax their bodies and move farther away from one another, still without speaking or looking at anyone. To the careful observer, it is an interesting performance, and yet it all happens automatically.

The norms described above—choosing one’s own mate, keeping one’s own money, and maintaining personal space on an elevator—are all related to the value of individualism, which is a central value in the United States. This is in contrast to Japan, for example, where the central value is family loyalty, or among Native Americans of the Hopi culture, who place a great emphasis on the value of community. Each culture has one or more central values, and these values have both positive and negative aspects. The positive side of individualism is that it tends to make Americans value independence, initiative, and achievement. The negative side is that it can lead to selfishness and a disregard for community.

Sanctions

Most people conform to norms because they prefer to be accepted by others, rather than being excluded or ridiculed. If you were to get on an elevator and stand facing the back, people might stare at you. If you were to stand very close to a stranger, he or she might become hostile, and some people might even become violent if they perceived your closeness as

¹This behavior was actually observed by two of my students, who did a research project on elevator behavior.

threatening. Being accepted is a form of reward. Being excluded, ridiculed, or physically hurt is a punishment.

Sociologists call these rewards and punishments **sanctions**. Rewards for following norms are **positive sanctions** and punishments for violating norms are **negative sanctions**. However, the sanctions for cultural norms seldom need to be applied, because most people internalize those norms and follow them automatically. This internalization serves people well as long as they are interacting with others of their own culture. However, a lack of knowledge of the norms that have been internalized by people of another culture can cause serious misunderstandings.

Richard Borshay Lee, an anthropologist who did field research among the !Kung people in southern Africa, learned about one of their internalized norms the hard way. At the end of his field work, he decided to show his gratitude for all the help that people had given him by buying the biggest ox he could find and allowing them to slaughter it for their annual Christmas feast. But as soon as he arranged for the purchase of the ox, he began receiving visits from various members of the community, who all told him that it was the worst animal in the area and that everyone would go hungry. He was baffled and became increasingly dismayed right up to the day of the feast, when it became quite evident that he had made the right choice. Then when everyone began laughing really hard, he realized that the whole community had played a huge joke on him and had managed to maintain the joke for ten days.

When Lee (1969) began asking people why they had done this, he learned that the !Kung have no tolerance for someone who becomes arrogant or boastful, which was how they perceived his pride in the purchase of the ox. They survive by hunting, which requires the full cooperation of every man in the community, without anyone placing himself above the others. So to maintain this equality, they never praise one another for skill in hunting, but always say the opposite of the reality, such as to call a good kill a worthless pile of bones. Any !Kung hunter would understand the routine and would even mock himself. But because Lee had not grown up among them, he had not internalized this particular

norm, and so was upset and confused by their mocking assessment of his wonderful ox.

The Internalization of Norms

Another way of expressing the idea that norms are internalized is to say that culture is the part of society that we carry around within ourselves. If you have spent time in another country, or if you know someone from another country, you have likely noticed variations in the ways that people of different cultures think and behave. Sometimes those variations become negatively labeled, as the following example will illustrate. There is a stereotype among many Americans that people in Paris are rude, and many French people have the same stereotype about Americans. This misunderstanding is derived from a difference in folkways. Americans tend to value straightforwardness and getting things done quickly. When we walk into a store or restaurant or hail a taxi, we believe that we are showing consideration for the store clerk, waiter, or taxi driver if we get right to the point. Many Americans have so completely internalized this norm that, no matter where in the world they happen to be traveling, such as in France, they will walk into a store and immediately state what they wish to purchase. They are similarly straightforward about ordering food in a restaurant. Then they feel annoyed when the store clerk or waiter treats them in a cool manner. Some people, after hailing a taxi, will state their destination even before getting in. Then they are baffled when the driver takes off, leaving them on the curb.² They do not understand that the French person feels annoyed by the American's lack of attention to the simple courtesy of saying *Bonjour, monsieur* ("Good day, sir") or *Bonjour, madame* ("Good day, ma'am") before getting down to business—something that is taken for granted in cultures where people value human interaction over the accomplishment of tasks. Americans who are willing to learn that simple custom of greeting a person before making a demand are likely to find the French to be friendly, courteous, and

²This scenario was described by Platt (2000).

ON THE WEB

www.carla.umn.edu/culture/definitions.html

CARLA is the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition at the University of Minnesota. Because the learning of language is cultural, this Web site includes a page that shows a variety of ways that sociologists and anthropologists define the concept of culture.

<http://cecp.air.org/cultural>

The Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice has a section of its Web site that focuses specifically on cultural competence. This section has links to pages that define cultural competence and explain why it is important, especially for people working in the areas of health care and human services.

www.mkgandhi.org

www.kamat.com/mmgandhi/gandhi.htm

These two sites provide information about the life and work of Mahatma Gandhi, who is mentioned at the end of this chapter.

helpful. However, because people's behavioral norms are internalized and not quite conscious, it takes some effort to understand and adopt the norms of another culture.

Another deeply internalized aspect of culture that may create misunderstanding is a norm related to physical space. Imagine that each person is standing within a set of circles. The first circle is for family and other intimate relationships. There is a larger circle for friends, a larger one than that for acquaintances, and a still larger one for strangers. The problem is that each culture has circles of different sizes.

For example, the circle for intimate space in the United States may be the same as the circle for friends in Latin American cultures, and acquaintance space in the United States may be space for strangers in

Latin America. One may imagine a scenario in which two men, one from Venezuela and the other from the United States, are having a conversation. The Venezuelan may begin the conversation standing fairly close to the North American. This will likely make the latter feel a bit uncomfortable, although on a subconscious level, and he will automatically take a small step back. The Venezuelan, in turn, may then feel uncomfortable by the increased distance, again on a subconscious level, and he will move forward. During the conversation, the North American may have a vague sense that the Venezuelan is being aggressive, while the Venezuelan is beginning to wonder why the other person is so unfriendly. They may not even see the connection of their impressions of each other to their different perceptions of space, although a careful observer might notice that the Venezuelan is gradually backing the North American across the room.

CULTURAL RELATIVISM AND ETHNOCENTRISM

These examples not only show that people internalize their norms. They also illustrate the importance of making an effort to understand other people's cultures—in other words, to adopt an attitude of **cultural relativism**. This means showing equal respect for all cultures. It does not mean that we have to like or approve of all the characteristics of another culture or that we will adopt them as our own. In fact, we may find some cultural features offensive. We only need to respect the right of people to have their own values and practices and to refrain from passing judgment on something with which we do not relate.

If, on the other hand, we fail to resist the impulse to make that judgment, and decide that someone of another culture is stupid, crazy, or immoral, we are guilty of **ethnocentrism**. This is the tendency to regard one's own culture as the standard for judging others. Ethnocentrism simply does not work these days, because we frequently meet people of other cultures, such as tourists, business travelers, students, and immigrants.

Although we do not need to feel total appreciation for everything in every culture, there are certain basic requirements for getting along in a

multicultural society. These are the open-mindedness and respect that are the essence of cultural relativism.

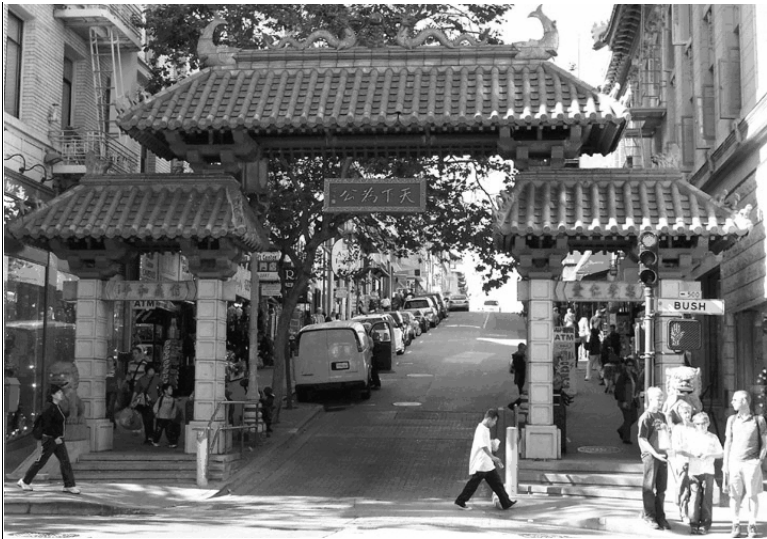
SUBCULTURES

The mention of society as multicultural reflects the fact that many societies do not have a single culture, but rather a number of cultures with one of them dominant. For example, in the United States there are many ethnic groups, and those groups often have particular customs, religious traditions, music, foods, and holidays, as well as strongly held values and norms. Sociologists refer to these ethnic groups as subcultures.

A **subculture** is a way of life that includes some of the values, norms, and practices of the mainstream society and has others specific to a smaller unit within that society. So, for example, Chinese people living in China are participants in the main culture, but Chinese people living in the United States constitute a subculture in relation to the dominant Anglo-American culture. Subcultures may also be based on age, social class, occupation, religion, and region of the country. Age subcultures are evident in the different conversational topics and speaking styles of teenagers and elderly people. Studies of class subcultures reveal a variety of life styles, ways of raising children, and political views. Each of these different types of subculture has a variety of beliefs and practices. At the same time, most people in the United States also participate in the main culture. This participation usually involves some knowledge of the English language, even if not all individuals possess equal fluency; certain common values, such beliefs about freedom and hard work; and familiarity with popular culture as it is presented in the mass media.

SOCIALIZATION

Because it was established at the beginning of this chapter that culture is not instinctive, one may wonder why it feels as though it is. If it is inside of us, how did it get there?



Chinese people living in the United States are an example of a subculture. (Photo by Steffen Lorenz)

Earlier we saw that culture is learned. The specific term for the means by which cultural learning occurs is **socialization**. This is the process through which members of a group, community, or society teach a person their ways of thinking and behaving. Because there is more than one meaning of the word “socialize,” it is important to emphasize that, in sociological terms, to socialize means to *teach*. But not all teaching occurs in the same way or during the same periods of people’s lives. Some of it is informal, and some is highly structured. Some teaching occurs in very early childhood, some of it a bit later, and some throughout one’s life. Sociologists distinguish these different types of socialization by calling them primary and secondary.

Primary socialization is the teaching of values, norms, language, and basic human interactions that happens mainly during the first five years of one’s life. Examples include toilet training, cooing communication between a parent and a baby, and the instruction by a parent to a child not to stare at people. A considerable amount of this teaching is not only informal but also subconscious. Parents are not always aware of what they

are teaching their children. Sometimes they may be amused to see a child taking on their behavior in simple everyday actions, such as when a two-year-old girl puts on her mother's hat and walks toward the front door. At other times they may be dismayed to find their offspring imitating a habit that the parents do not want them to adopt, such as when a little boy pretends that a lollipop stick is one of his father's cigarettes.

Although primary socialization is most intensive during early childhood, it continues to some extent throughout our lives, as we make changes in our values and behaviors. An adult may leave the religion of his or her parents and experience a process of learning new beliefs and acquiring a new religious identity, or the identity of being nonreligious. Another person may go into psychotherapy in the hope of eliminating self-defeating attitudes or behavior.

After early childhood, however, there is another type of socialization that predominates. This is **secondary socialization**, which is the teaching of skills needed by adults, such as knowing how to read, write, and count, as well knowledge related to one's occupation. Specific examples of this process are school, from kindergarten or nursery school through college or graduate school, and on-the-job training.

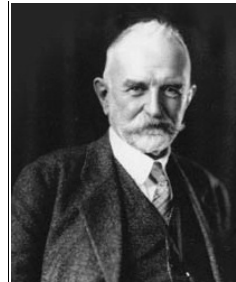
We may think of primary socialization as an experience that goes deep within a person—so that it feels like instinct—and secondary socialization as knowledge that sits more lightly on the surface of one's personality. We may also distinguish between the two by asking ourselves what our memories are of life without some particular area of knowledge. Most people cannot remember life without language, because language acquisition occurs at a very early age. It is part of primary socialization. However, if someone was born of English-speaking parents and began studying German in high school or college, that person can certainly remember life before German. An athlete can remember life before soccer and a musician can remember life before the first guitar. A student can remember life before becoming a sociology major or a design major or a future teacher. These skills are all aspects of secondary socialization.

Game, Play, and the Generalized Other

Another way of explaining socialization was suggested by George Herbert Mead (1934), a philosopher who taught at the University of Chicago about a century ago and who has been claimed by the field of sociology because so many of his ideas contributed to its foundations. An important focus of his work was the **self**, which we may define as a person's set of perceptions of who he or she is. Mead understood the human self as social and as evolving over time, from an unsocialized subject, which he called the "**I**," to a member of society, which he called the "**me**." He believed that children pass through three main stages of social development, and that these stages require interaction with others.

In the **play stage** the child may take on a role, as was illustrated above with regard to the mother's hat or the father's cigarette. The very young child has the capacity to take on only one role at a time, without seeing any connection between that role and others. This stage is one of pure imitation.

In the next stage, which Mead called the **game stage**, the child not only develops an awareness of connections between roles but also begins to perceive general rules that govern the interactions between them. At this point the child learns to control his or her behavior and also to obtain specific reactions of others to that behavior—such as getting a parent to smile. He or she is beginning to develop a sense of the self as a unit that can both act and be acted upon—hence the concept of the "**me**," the object of actions as well as perceptions, including the perception of one's own self. However, the fact that a child is capable of learning the rules does not mean that this child believes in them or identifies with them. For example, a four-year-old girl may know that eating the cubes in the sugar bowl will result in a scolding from her mother and to do this repeatedly will result in some kind of punishment. However, she follows the rule only while her mother is watching and raids the sugar bowl when her mother is out of the room.



George Herbert Mead
(1863-1931)

The final stage in the development of the self is the adoption of the **generalized other**. This refers to the set of norms and values of the society or community of which one is a member. To adopt the generalized other means that the individual has come to identify with the larger unit and has internalized its norms and values. In so doing the individual develops a sense of the unity of self and society.

One way of understanding the distinctions among these three stages and their relationship to the evolution of the social self is by imagining the concerns of the mother of three sons³ who is hosting a childless relative as an overnight guest. The ages of the boys are two, seven, and fourteen. Even before Aunt



Kate arrives, the mother is already having visions of the two-year-old, still in the play stage, imitating his aunt's

A young child, who has not yet developed the generalized other, needs to be taught socially appropriate behavior. (Photo by Gracey Stinson)

behavior by taking her purse, walking around the house with it, and possibly scattering the contents. So after showing Kate to the guest room, she advises her to keep her belongings out of sight in the closet.

The seven-year-old is fairly well behaved, having advanced to the game stage and knowing the rules, but Mom isn't taking any chances. So before Kate's arrival she sits him down and warns him that if he touches anything belonging to his aunt there will be dire consequences, such as the cancellation of next week's trip to the movies. She does not worry about the fourteen-year-old because, although he can sometimes be difficult to

³I am deliberately presenting all three children as the same sex so as to avoid the debate over potential differences in the moral development of males and females.

get along with, he is generally polite and considerate toward people outside of the household and would not be likely to take anything belonging to someone else. In other words, he has absorbed the attitude of the generalized other where personal property is concerned.

It is obvious that there are people who never reach that final stage of socialization, because other people try to protect themselves against them by locking their homes and cars and taking other precautions for personal safety. We may imagine that it would be wonderful to live in a world where no one ever did anything to harm anyone else and may wonder whether there might be some way to get everyone to absorb the generalized other. However, we might ask ourselves whether we would really want to live in a society in which no one ever questioned the norms. It might be peaceful but terribly rigid. It might also set everyone up to be manipulated by a few unscrupulous leaders who have somehow escaped from their socialization and have come to believe that the norms do not apply to them.

Nevertheless, we may be reassured by the fact that Mead found an escape hatch in his theory. He pointed out that, for most people, the me, or the controlled self, never completely takes over the I, which is the imaginative, spontaneous, somewhat wild self. The I is the aspect of the self that breaks out of routine patterns, that expresses individuality, and that has fun. It is also the aspect of the self that questions the accepted ways of doing things.

Obviously not everyone does this to the same degree. There are people, usually strict conformists, who closely identify the I with the me. Nevertheless, many other people, even though they understand that life moves along smoothly when one adopts certain cultural norms, such as respect for other persons and their belongings, still manage to retain their creativity and relative independence.

The Dramaturgical Model

The tension between the spontaneous and the socialized aspects of the self was explored in depth by Erving Goffman, a twentieth century American sociologist who was very much influenced by the work of Mead.

WHERE AM I IN ALL THIS?

Think about a situation in which the “me” aspect of your self is evident—in other words, a situation in which you are automatically following the norms of the society or of a group without having to think about it. Now think about a situation in which the “I” takes over. How does each of these two situations feel different from the other? Why are both aspects of your self important?

Goffman analyzed everyday life by means of the **dramaturgical model**—that is, the metaphor of a stage performance (Goffman 1959). In his analysis people present to the world their public self, in order to get desired results from others, while concealing those aspects of the self that would defeat their purposes. For example, someone interviewing for a job needs to display to the prospective employer all the traits that would indicate good qualifications for the position. At the same time, the job candidate would withhold information that could bias the interviewer against him or her. These might include religion, sexual orientation, or the fact that a female candidate has young children. Goffman thus demonstrated how people who are most likely to get what they want out of a social interaction are those who manage to conform to societal expectations by concealing the I, or the back stage self, and displaying the me, or the front stage self.

Symbols and Communication

Socialization requires communication, and humans communicate through symbols. A **symbol** is a word, action, sign, sound, signal, color, or object that is used to represent something other than itself, with a meaning that people of the same culture share. There are religious symbols (cross, star of David, lotus, star and crescent), political symbols (flag, eagle), traffic symbols (lights, sirens), and other everyday symbols (rose for love, red for danger). Language is communication through symbols, especially words and gestures, and is an important means of socialization.

Once a child learns a language, parents and other caregivers are able to tell the child what is expected of her or him.

Language is an important aspect of culture because it defines our reality by helping to communicate our norms and values. For example, children raised in a traditional Christian household may be taught that to disobey one's parents is a sin and is displeasing to God. The parents may also explain that some sins are so serious that people who commit them will go to hell. On the other hand, children raised by humanistic parents are not likely to be familiar with words like "sin" or "hell"—unless they hear the latter when someone is expressing frustration. The parents will have other explanations for the need for good behavior, such as by telling the children that they will be happy if they treat others the same way as they would like to be treated.

STARTING OVER

As mentioned earlier, the most intensive period of primary socialization occurs during early childhood. However, sometimes adults undergo deep changes in their values and behaviors. This is called **resocialization**, and it may be defined as the reconstruction of the individual's social self. This process usually involves the actions of other people on the person being resocialized. It occurs when people enter psychoanalysis, join a twelve step group, get confined to a prison, or go through military basic training.

If you have friends in the military, you likely noticed a difference in them when they came home for their first leave. There was a new appearance of self-control in their behavior. They stood straighter and spoke more politely. Gone were the shaggy hair, slouching posture, and casual attitudes. They had undergone resocialization.

Another experience of resocialization is psychoanalysis. This is a form of psychotherapy that may be chosen by people who have within themselves some characteristic that is preventing them from living life the way they want to. For example, a man who is still single at the age of forty

and who longs to be married may wonder why he has never been able to sustain a relationship for any length of time. In the course of psychoanalysis he may rediscover the pain that he had experienced as a young child when his grandmother quarreled with his mother, disappeared from his life, and died before there could be any reconciliation. After he comes to realize that this early experience is at the root of his inability to trust women, he may overcome this problem and be on the path to the life that he desires.

Twelve-step programs are yet another instance of resocialization. For example, members of Alcoholics Anonymous believe that a person who wishes to recover from a serious drinking problem needs a thorough change in mind set. The constant repetition of the words “you just don’t drink, no matter what” replaces the thought patterns that had previously led the person to the bottle. A new member is sponsored by a more experienced one who has maintained a period of sobriety and takes on the task of teaching the newcomer how to live without alcohol. Frequent attendance at meetings reinforces this teaching, as do the slogans that are on the walls of the meeting places and in the printed literature. The most successful A.A. members are those who surround themselves with people who share their goals.

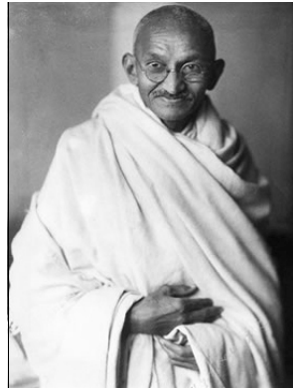
A much less pleasant resocialization process occurs when people enter prison. Prisoners are stripped of all of their clothing, submitted to an extremely invasive search of their bodies, and placed in a situation in which they will be told when to eat, when to sleep, and when to be present in specific places to be counted. Failure to observe a large number of highly restrictive rules results in punishment, including solitary confinement, and prisoners may be berated, ridiculed, and even physically attacked by the guards. In addition, prisoners frequently intimidate and abuse newer prisoners. It is the rare person who can maintain a strong sense of his or her pre-prison identity under the dehumanizing conditions of incarceration.

CULTURE AND CREATIVITY

The foregoing discussion of resocialization may raise questions about the relationship of social learning to individual freedom. It is easy to think that the process of socialization, whether occurring in early childhood or later in life, turns people into robots, as though we were all programmed to think the same way. Self-help groups and new religious movements have even been accused of “brainwashing” their members. However, the fact of having been taught almost everything we know does not mean that this teaching has a complete hold on our minds. People are far more complex than that.

Human beings have the capacity to be creative about the culture that they have learned, much as a poet or a composer is creative. A poet learns the same language as everyone else, but then puts words together in a way that no one has ever done before. A composer takes the same musical theory that other people learn and writes a composition that is different from what anyone has ever heard.

Some people show a similar creativity with regard to their cultures. For example, Mahatma Gandhi, the leader of the nonviolent revolution that freed India from British rule, was raised in a culture that taught that people were born into social positions, or castes, from which they could not move, and those in the lowest position were called “outcastes,” or “untouchables.” But within that same culture there existed the belief that everyone is part of the same web of life and that this web is linked to the divine. This belief is at the root of the Hindu concept of reincarnation and of *ahimsa*, or non-harming, which includes the belief in nonviolence. Gandhi creatively rethought his cultural values and combined them in a new way. He decided to call the



Ghandi used his culture creatively and became a leader in a movement for social change.

untouchables *Harijans*, which in his language means “children of God,” and to treat them with respect. Instead of being merely programmed by his culture, Gandhi used it creatively and became a leader in a movement for social change.

Most people lead less dramatic lives than Gandhi’s but nonetheless have the capacity to be continually evolving. We need only be open to learning and to thinking critically about what we have learned. We may decide what we agree with, discard what we find unconvincing, and figure out how to integrate new learning with our sense of self. In this way the “I” will not only find balance with the “me” but, as Mead suggested, may also be the source of new ideas that will have an influence on the social environment.

Key Points

- Human beings do not have instincts. We survive by means of culture.
- Culture is the part of society that is within each person.
- Socialization is the teaching of culture.
- Symbols are important for communication and socialization.
- Socialization does not program us as though we were robots. We may think creatively about the values that we have learned and make changes.

Key Concepts

cultural relativism	I and me	secondary
culture	mores	socialization
dramaturgical model	norms	self
ethnocentrism	play stage	socialization
folkways	primary socialization	subculture
game stage	resocialization	symbol
generalized other	sanctions	values

Study Questions

1. Why do sociologists believe that human beings do not have instincts? How is this different from the “common sense” idea that most people have about this subject?
2. What are the central values in the United States and Japan? What influence might these different values have on an important decision that a person would make—such as what to study in college or whom to marry?
3. What kind of sanction did the !Kung people use with Richard Borshay Lee? Was it effective? Can you think of a situation in which an informal sanction (such as exclusion or ridicule) would have a powerful effect on your behavior?
4. How does the example of Ghandi show that a person may be a product of a culture and may also be creative in one’s thoughts and actions? How would you describe the relationship between his “me” and his “I”?

