

Unit 3: Socialization



In the summer of 2005, police detective Mark Holste followed an investigator from the Department of Children and Families to a home in Plant City, Florida. They were there to look into a statement from the neighbor concerning a shabby house on Old Sydney Road. A small girl was reported peering from one of its broken windows. This seemed odd because no one in the neighborhood had seen a young child in or around the home, which had been inhabited for the past three years by a woman, her boyfriend, and two adult sons. Who was the mystery girl in the window?

Entering the house, Detective Holste and his team were shocked. It was the worst mess they'd ever seen, infested with cockroaches, smeared with feces and urine from both people and pets, and filled with dilapidated furniture and ragged window coverings.

Detective Holste headed down a hallway and entered a small room. That's where he found the little girl, with big, vacant eyes, staring into the darkness. A newspaper report later described the detective's first encounter with the child: "She lay on a torn, moldy mattress on the floor. She was curled on her side . . . her ribs and collarbone jutted out . . . her black hair was matted, crawling with lice. Insect bites, rashes and sores pocked her skin . . . She was naked—except for a swollen diaper. . . . Her name, her mother said, was Danielle. She was almost seven years old" (DeGregory 2008).

Detective Holste immediately carried Danielle out of the home. She was taken to a hospital for medical treatment and evaluation. Through extensive testing, doctors determined that, although she was severely malnourished, Danielle was able to see, hear, and vocalize normally. Still, she wouldn't look anyone in the eyes, didn't know how to chew or swallow solid food, didn't cry, didn't respond to stimuli that would typically cause pain, and didn't know how to communicate either with words or simple gestures such as nodding "yes" or "no." Likewise, although tests showed she had no chronic diseases or genetic abnormalities, the only way she could stand was with someone holding onto her hands, and she "walked sideways on her toes, like a crab" (DeGregory 2008).

What had happened to Danielle? Put simply: beyond the basic requirements for survival, she had been neglected. Based on their investigation, social workers concluded that she had been left almost entirely alone in rooms like the one where she was found. Without regular interaction—the holding, hugging, talking, the explanations and demonstrations given to most young children—she had not learned to walk or to speak, to eat or to interact, to play or even to understand the world around her. From a sociological point of view, Danielle had not had been socialized.

Socialization is the process through which people are taught to be proficient members of a society. It describes the ways that people come to understand societal norms and expectations, to accept society's beliefs, and to be aware of societal values. *Socialization* is not the same as *socializing* (interacting with others, like family, friends, and coworkers); to be precise, it is a sociological process that occurs through socializing. As Danielle's story illustrates, even the most basic of human activities are learned. You may be surprised to know that even physical tasks like sitting, standing, and walking had not automatically developed for Danielle as she grew. And without socialization, Danielle hadn't learned about the material culture of her society (the tangible objects a culture uses): for example, she couldn't hold a spoon, bounce a ball, or use a chair for sitting. She also hadn't learned its nonmaterial culture, such as its beliefs, values, and norms. She had no understanding of the concept of "family," didn't know cultural expectations for using a bathroom for elimination, and had no sense of modesty. Most importantly, she hadn't learned to use the symbols that make up language—through which we learn about who we are, how we fit with other people, and the natural and social worlds in which we live.

Sociologists have long been fascinated by circumstances like Danielle's—in which a child receives sufficient human support to survive, but virtually no social interaction—because they highlight how much we depend

on social interaction to provide the information and skills that we need to be part of society or even to develop a “self.”

The necessity for early social contact was demonstrated by the research of Harry and Margaret Harlow. From 1957 to 1963, the Harlows conducted a series of experiments studying how rhesus monkeys, which behave a lot like people, are affected by isolation as babies. They studied monkeys raised under two types of “substitute” mothering circumstances: a mesh and wire sculpture, or a soft terrycloth “mother.” The monkeys systematically preferred the company of a soft, terrycloth substitute mother (closely resembling a rhesus monkey) that was unable to feed them, to a mesh and wire mother that provided sustenance via a feeding tube. This demonstrated that while food was important, social comfort was of greater value (Harlow and Harlow 1962; Harlow 1971). Later experiments testing more severe isolation revealed that such deprivation of social contact led to significant developmental and social challenges later in life.

Psychological Perspectives on Self-Development

Psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) was one of the most influential modern scientists to put forth a theory about how people develop a sense of self. He believed that personality and sexual development were closely linked, and he divided the maturation process into psychosexual stages: oral, anal, phallic, latency, and genital. He posited that people’s self development is closely linked to early stages of development, like breastfeeding, toilet training, and sexual awareness (Freud 1905).

According to Freud, failure to properly engage in or disengage from a specific stage results in emotional and psychological consequences throughout adulthood. An adult with an oral fixation may indulge in overeating or binge drinking. An anal fixation may produce a neat freak (hence the term “anal retentive”), while a person stuck in the phallic stage may be promiscuous or emotionally immature. Although no solid empirical evidence supports Freud’s theory, his ideas continue to contribute to the work of scholars in a variety of disciplines.

Sociology or Psychology: What’s the Difference?

You might be wondering: if sociologists and psychologists are both interested in people and their behavior, how are these two disciplines different? What do they agree on, and where do their ideas diverge? The answers are complicated, but the distinction is important to scholars in both fields.

As a general difference, we might say that while both disciplines are interested in human behavior, psychologists are focused on how the mind influences that behavior, while sociologists study the role of society in shaping behavior. Psychologists are interested in people’s mental development and how their minds process their world. Sociologists are more likely to focus on how different aspects of society contribute to an individual’s relationship with his world. Another way to think of the difference is that psychologists tend to look inward (mental health, emotional processes), while sociologists tend to look outward (social institutions, cultural norms, interactions with others) to understand human behavior.

Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) was the first to make this distinction in research, when he attributed differences in suicide rates among people to social causes (religious differences) rather than to psychological causes (like their mental wellbeing) (Durkheim 1897). Today, we see this same distinction. For example, a sociologist studying how a couple gets to the point of their first kiss on a date might focus her research on cultural norms for dating, social patterns of sexual activity over time, or how this process is different for seniors than for teens. A psychologist would more likely be interested in the person’s earliest sexual awareness or the mental processing of sexual desire.

Sometimes sociologists and psychologists have collaborated to increase knowledge. In recent decades, however, their fields have become more clearly separated as sociologists increasingly focus on large societal issues and patterns, while psychologists remain honed in on the human mind. Both disciplines make valuable contributions through different approaches that provide us with different types of useful insights.

Psychologist Erik Erikson (1902–1994) created a theory of personality development based, in part, on the work of Freud. However, Erikson believed the personality continued to change over time and was never truly finished. His theory includes eight stages of development, beginning with birth and ending with death.

According to Erikson, people move through these stages throughout their lives. In contrast to Freud's focus on psychosexual stages and basic human urges, Erikson's view of self development gave credit to more social aspects, like the way we negotiate between our own base desires and what is socially accepted (Erikson 1982). Jean Piaget (1896–1980) was a psychologist who specialized in child development, focusing specifically on the role of social interactions in their development. He recognized that the development of self evolved through a negotiation between the world as it exists in one's mind and the world that exists as it is experienced socially (Piaget 1954). All three of these thinkers have contributed to our modern understanding of self development.

Sociological Theories of Self Development

One of the pioneering contributors to sociological perspectives was Charles Cooley (1864–1929). He asserted that people's self understanding is constructed, in part, by their perception of how others view them—a process termed “the looking glass self” (Cooley 1902).

Later, George Herbert Mead (1863–1931) studied the self, a person's distinct identity that is developed through social interaction. In order to engage in this process of “self,” an individual has to be able to view him or herself through the eyes of others. That's not an ability that we are born with (Mead 1934). The case of Danielle, for example, illustrates what happens when social interaction is absent from early experience: she had no ability to see herself as others would see her. From Mead's point of view, she had no “self.”

How do we get from being newborns to being humans with “selves?” Mead believed that there is a specific path of development that all people go through. During the preparatory stage, children are only capable of imitation: they have no ability to imagine how others see things. They copy the actions of people with whom they regularly interact, such as their mothers and fathers. This is followed by the play stage, during which children begin to take on the role that one other person might have. Thus, children might try on a parent's point of view by acting out “grownup” behavior, like playing “dress up” and acting out the “mom” role, or talking on a toy telephone the way they see their father do.

During the game stage, children learn to consider several roles at the same time and how those roles interact with each other. They learn to understand interactions involving different people with a variety of purposes. For example, a child at this is likely to be aware of the different responsibilities of people in a restaurant who together make for a smooth dining experience (someone seats you, another takes your order, someone else cooks the food, while yet another clears away dirty dishes).

Finally, children develop, understand, and learn the idea of the generalized other, the common behavioral expectations of general society. By this stage of development, an individual is able to imagine how he or she is viewed by one or many others—and thus, from a sociological perspective, to have a “self” (Mead 1934; Mead 1964).

Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development

Moral development is an important part of the socialization process. The term refers to the way people learn what society considered to be “good” and “bad,” which is important for a smoothly functioning society. Moral development prevents people from acting on unchecked urges, instead considering what is right for society and good for others. Lawrence Kohlberg (1927–1987) was interested in how people learn to decide what is right and what is wrong. To understand this topic, he developed a theory of moral development that includes three levels: preconventional, conventional, and postconventional.

In the preconventional stage, young children, who lack a higher level of cognitive ability, experience the world around them only through their senses. It isn't until the teen years that the conventional theory develops, when youngsters become increasingly aware of others' feelings and take those into consideration when determining what's “good” and “bad.” The final stage, called postconventional, is when people begin to think of morality in abstract terms, such as Americans believing that everyone has the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. At this stage, people also recognize that legality and morality do not always match up evenly (Kohlberg 1981). When hundreds of thousands of Egyptians turned out in 2011 to protest government corruption, they were using postconventional morality. They understood that although their government was legal, it was not morally correct.

Gilligan's Theory of Moral Development and Gender

Another sociologist, Carol Gilligan (1936–), recognized that Kohlberg's theory might show gender bias since his research was only conducted on male subjects. Would females study subjects have responded differently? Would a female social scientist notice different patterns when analyzing the research? To answer the first question, she set out to study differences between how boys and girls developed morality. Gilligan's research demonstrated that boys and girls do, in fact, have different understandings of morality. Boys tend to have a justice perspective, placing emphasis on rules and laws. Girls, on the other hand, have a care and responsibility perspective; they consider people's reasons behind behavior that seems morally wrong. Gilligan also recognized that Kohlberg's theory rested on the assumption that the justice perspective was the right, or better, perspective. Gilligan, in contrast, theorized that neither perspective was "better": the two norms of justice served different purposes. Ultimately, she explained that boys are socialized for a work environment where rules make operations run smoothly, while girls are socialized for a home environment where flexibility allows for harmony in caretaking and nurturing (Gilligan 1982; Gilligan 1990).

What a Pretty Little Lady!

"What a cute dress!" "I like the ribbons in your hair." "Wow, you look so pretty today."

According to Lisa Bloom, author of *Think: Straight Talk for Women to Stay Smart in a Dumb World*, most of us use pleasantries like these when we first meet little girls. "So what?" you might ask.

Bloom asserts that we are too focused on the appearance of young girls, and as a result, our society is socializing them to believe that how they look is of vital importance. And Bloom may be on to something. How often do you tell a little boy how attractive his outfit is, how nice looking his shoes are, or how handsome he looks today? To support her assertions, Bloom cites, as one example, that about 50 percent of girls ages three to six worry about being fat (Bloom 2011). We're talking kindergarteners who are concerned about their body image. Sociologists are acutely interested in of this type of gender socialization, where societal expectations of how boys and girls should *be*—how they should behave, what toys and colors they should like, and how important their attire is—are reinforced.

One solution to this type of gender socialization is being experimented with at the Egalia preschool in Sweden, where children develop in a genderless environment. All of the children at Egalia are referred to with neutral terms like "friend" instead of "he" or "she." Play areas and toys are consciously set up to eliminate any reinforcement of gender expectations (Haney 2011). Egalia strives to eliminate all societal gender norms from these children's preschool world.

Extreme? Perhaps. So what is the middle ground? Bloom suggests that we start with simple steps: when introduced to a young girl, ask about her favorite book or what she likes. In short, engage her mind ... not her outward appearance (Bloom 2011).

Why Socialization Matters

Socialization is critical both to individuals and to the societies in which they live. It illustrates how completely intertwined human beings and their social worlds are. First, it is through teaching culture to new members that a society perpetuates itself. If new generations of a society don't learn its way of life, it ceases to exist. Whatever is distinctive about a culture must be transmitted to those who join it in order for a society to survive. For American culture to continue, for example, children in the United States must learn about cultural values related to democracy: they have to learn the norms of voting, as well as how to use material objects such as voting machines. Of course, some would argue that it's just as important in American culture for the younger generation to learn the etiquette of eating in a restaurant or the rituals of tailgate parties at

football games. In fact, there are many ideas and objects that Americans teach children in hopes of keeping the society's way of life going through another generation.

Socialization is just as essential to us as individuals. Social interaction provides the means via which we gradually become able to see ourselves through the eyes of others, learning who we are and how we fit into the world around us. In addition, to function successfully in society, we have to learn the basics of both material and nonmaterial culture, everything from how to dress ourselves to what's suitable attire for a specific occasion; from when we sleep to what we sleep on; and from what's considered appropriate to eat for dinner to how to use the stove to prepare it. Most importantly, we have to learn language—whether it's the dominant language or one common in a subculture, whether it's verbal or through signs—in order to communicate and to think. As we saw with Danielle, without socialization we literally have no self.

Nature versus Nurture

Some experts assert that who we are is a result of nurture—the relationships and caring that surround us. Others argue that who we are is based entirely in genetics. According to this belief, our temperaments, interests, and talents are set before birth. From this perspective, then, who we are depends on nature.

One way that researchers attempt to prove the impact of nature is by studying twins. Some studies followed identical twins who were raised separately. The pairs shared the same genetics, but, in some cases, were socialized in different ways. Instances of this type of situation are rare, but studying the degree to which identical twins raised apart are the same and different can give researchers insight into how our temperaments, preferences, and abilities are shaped by our genetic makeup versus our social environment. For example, in 1968, twin girls born to a mentally ill mother were put up for adoption. However, they were also separated from each other and raised in different households. The parents, and certainly the babies, did not realize they were one of five pairs of twins who were made subjects of a scientific study (Flam 2007). In 2003, the two women, then age 35, reunited. Elyse Schein and Paula Bernstein sat together in awe, feeling like they were looking into a mirror. Not only did they look alike, but they behaved alike, using the same hand gestures and facial expressions (Spratling 2007). Studies like these point to the genetic roots of our temperament and behavior.

Though genetics and hormones play an important role in human behavior, sociology's larger concern is the effect that society has on human behavior, the “nurture” side of the nature versus nurture debate. What race were the twins? From what social class were their parents? What about gender? Religion? All of these factors affect the lives of the twins as much as their genetic makeup and are critical to consider as we look at life through the sociological lens.

The Life of Chris Langan, the Smartest Man You've Never Heard Of

Bouncer. Firefighter. Factory worker. Cowboy. Chris Langan spent the majority of his adult life just getting by with jobs like these. He had no college degree, few resources, and a past filled with much disappointment. Chris Langan also had an IQ of over 195, nearly 100 points higher than the average person (Brabham 2001). So why didn't Chris become a neurosurgeon, professor, or aeronautical engineer? According to Malcolm Gladwell (2008) in his book *Outliers: The Story of Success*, Chris didn't possess the set of social skills necessary to succeed on such a high level—skills that aren't innate, but learned.

Gladwell looked to a recent study conducted by sociologist Annette Lareau in which she closely shadowed 12 families from various economic backgrounds and examined their parenting techniques. Parents from lower income families followed a strategy of “accomplishment of natural growth,” which is to say they let their children develop on their own with a large amount of independence; parents from higher income families, however, “actively fostered and accessed a child's talents, opinions, and skills” (Gladwell 2008). These parents were more likely to engage in analytical conversation, encourage active questioning of the establishment, and foster development of negotiation skills. The parents were also able to introduce their children to a wide range of activities, from sports to music to accelerated academic programs. When one middle class child was denied entry to a gifted and talented program, the mother petitioned the school and arranged additional testing until her daughter was admitted. Lower income parents, however, were more likely to unquestioningly obey authorities such as school boards. Their children were not being socialized to comfortably confront the system and speak up (Gladwell 2008).

What does this have to do with Chris Langan, deemed by some as the smartest man in the world (Brabham 2001)? Chris was born in severe poverty, moving across the country with an abusive and alcoholic stepfather. Chris's genius went greatly unnoticed. After accepting a full scholarship to Reed College, his funding was revoked after his mother failed to fill out necessary paperwork. Unable to successfully make his case to the administration, Chris, who had received straight A's the previous semester, was given F's on his transcript and forced to drop out. After enrolling in Montana State, an administrator's refusal to rearrange his class schedule left him unable to find the means necessary to travel the 16 miles to attend classes. What Chris had in brilliance, he lacked practical intelligence, or what psychologist Robert Sternberg defines as "knowing what to say to whom, knowing when to say it, and knowing how to say it for maximum effect" (Sternberg et al. 2000). Such knowledge was never part of his socialization.

Chris gave up on school and began working an array of blue-collar jobs, pursuing his intellectual interests on the side. Though he's recently garnered attention from work on his "Cognitive Theoretic Model of the Universe," he remains weary and resistant of the educational system.

As Gladwell concluded, "He'd had to make his way alone, and no one—not rock stars, not professional athletes, not software billionaires, and not even geniuses—ever makes it alone" (2008).

Sociologists all recognize the importance of socialization for healthy individual and societal development. But how do scholars working in the three major theoretical paradigms approach this topic? Structural functionalists would say that socialization is essential to society, both because it trains members to operate successfully within it and because it perpetuates culture by transmitting it to new generations. Without socialization, a society's culture would perish as members died off. A conflict theorist might argue that socialization reproduces inequality from generation to generation by conveying different expectations and norms to those with different social characteristics. For example, individuals are socialized differently by gender, social class, and race. As in the illustration of Chris Langan, this creates different (unequal) opportunities. An interactionist studying socialization is concerned with face-to-face exchanges and symbolic communication. For example, dressing baby boys in blue and baby girls in pink is one small way that messages are conveyed about differences in gender roles.

Agents of Socialization

Socialization helps people learn to function successfully in their social worlds. How does the process of socialization occur? How do we learn to use the objects of our society's material culture? How do we come to adopt the beliefs, values, and norms that represent its nonmaterial culture? This learning takes place through interaction with various agents of socialization, like peer groups and families, plus both formal and informal social institutions.

Social Group Agents

Social groups often provide the first experiences of socialization. Families, and later peer groups, communicate expectations and reinforce norms. People first learn to use the tangible objects of material culture in these settings, as well as being introduced to the beliefs and values of society.

Family

Family is the first agent of socialization. Mothers and fathers, siblings and grandparents, plus members of an extended family, all teach a child what he or she needs to know. For example, they show the child how to use objects (such as clothes, computers, eating utensils, books, bikes); how to relate to others (some as "family," others as "friends," still others as "strangers" or "teachers" or "neighbors"); and how the world works (what is "real" and what is "imagined"). As you are aware, either from your own experience as a child or your role in helping to raise one, socialization involves teaching and learning about an unending array of objects and ideas.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that families do not socialize children in a vacuum. Many social factors impact how a family raises its children. For example, we can use sociological imagination to recognize that individual behaviors are affected by the historical period in which they take place. Sixty years ago, it would not have been considered especially strict for a father to hit his son with a wooden spoon or a belt if he misbehaved, but today that same action might be considered child abuse.

Sociologists recognize that race, social class, religion, and other societal factors play an important role in socialization. For example, poor families usually emphasize obedience and conformity when raising their children, while wealthy families emphasize judgment and creativity (National Opinion Research Center 2008). This may be because working-class parents have less education and more repetitive-task jobs for which the ability to follow rules and to conform helps. Wealthy parents tend to have better educations and often work in managerial positions or in careers that require creative problem solving, so they teach their children behaviors that would be beneficial in these positions. This means that children are effectively socialized and raised to take the types of jobs that their parents already have, thus reproducing the class system (Kohn 1977).

Likewise, children are socialized to abide by gender norms, perceptions of race, and class-related behaviors. In Sweden, for instance, stay-at-home fathers are an accepted part of the social landscape. A government policy provides subsidized time off work—480 days for families with newborns—with the option of the paid leave being shared between both mothers and fathers. As one stay-at-home dad says, being home to take care of his baby son “is a real fatherly thing to do. I think that’s very masculine” (Associated Press 2011). How do America’s policies—and our society’s expected gender roles—compare? How will Swedish children raised this way be socialized to parental gender norms? How might that be different from parental gender norms in the United States?

Peer Groups

A peer group is made up of people who are similar in age and social status and who share interests. Peer group socialization begins in the earliest years, such as when kids on a playground teach younger children the norms about taking turns or the rules of a game or how to shoot a basket. As children grow into teenagers, this process continues. Peer groups are important to adolescents in a new way, as they begin to develop an identity separate from their parents and exert independence. Additionally, peer groups provide their own opportunities for socialization since kids usually engage in different types of activities with their peers than they do with their families. Peer groups provide adolescents’ first major socialization experience outside the realm of their families. Interestingly, studies have shown that although friendships rank high in adolescents’ priorities, this is balanced by parental influence.

Institutional Agents

The social institutions of our culture also inform our socialization. Formal institutions—like schools, workplaces, and the government—teach people how to behave in and navigate these systems. Other institutions, like the media, contribute to socialization by inundating us with messages about norms and expectations.

School

Most American children spend about seven hours a day, 180 days a year, in school, which makes it hard to deny the importance school has on their socialization (U.S. Department of Education 2004). Students are not only in school to study math, reading, science, and other subjects—the manifest function of this system. Schools also serve a latent function in society by socializing children into behaviors like teamwork, following a schedule, and using textbooks. School and classroom rituals, led by teachers serving as role models and leaders, regularly reinforce what society expects from children. Sociologists describe this aspect of schools as the hidden curriculum, the informal teaching done by schools.

For example, in the United States, schools have built a sense of competition into the way grades are awarded and the way teachers evaluate students (Bowles and Gintis 1976). When children participate in a relay race or a math contest, they learn that there are winners and losers in society. When children are required to work together on a project, they practice teamwork with other people in cooperative situations. The hidden curriculum prepares children for the adult world. Children learn how to deal with bureaucracy, rules, expectations, waiting their turn, and sitting still for hours during the day. Schools in different cultures socialize children differently in order to prepare them to function well in those cultures. The latent functions of teamwork and dealing with bureaucracy are features of American culture.

Schools also socialize children by teaching them about citizenship and national pride. In the United States, children are taught to say the Pledge of Allegiance. Most districts require classes about U.S. history and geography. As academic understanding of history evolves, textbooks in the United States have been scrutinized and revised to update attitudes toward other cultures as well as perspectives on historical events; thus, children are socialized to a different national or world history than earlier textbooks may have done. For example, information about the mistreatment of African Americans and Native American Indians more accurately reflects those events than in textbooks of the past.

The Workplace

Just as children spend much of their day at school, many American adults at some point invest a significant amount of time at a place of employment. Although socialized into their culture since birth, workers require new socialization into a workplace, both in terms of material culture (such as how to operate the copy machine) and nonmaterial culture (such as whether it's okay to speak directly to the boss or how the refrigerator is shared). Different jobs require different types of socialization. In the past, many people worked a single job until retirement. Today, the trend is to switch jobs at least once a decade. Between the ages of 18 and 44, the average baby boomer of the younger set held 11 different jobs (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2010). This means that people must become socialized to, and socialized by, a variety of work environments.

Religion

While some religions may tend toward being an informal institution, this section focuses on practices related to formal institutions. Religion is an important avenue of socialization for many people. The United States is full of synagogues, temples, churches, mosques, and similar religious communities where people gather to worship and learn. Like other institutions, these places teach participants how to interact with the religion's material culture (like a mezuzah, a prayer rug, or a communion wafer). For some people, important ceremonies related to family structure—like marriage and birth—are connected to religious celebrations. Many of these institutions uphold gender norms and contribute to their enforcement through socialization. From ceremonial rites of passage that reinforce the family unit, to power dynamics which reinforce gender roles, religion fosters a shared set of socialized values that are passed on through society.

Government

Although we do not think about it, many of the rites of passage people go through today are based on age norms established by the government. To be defined as an “adult” usually means being 18 years old, the age at which a person becomes legally responsible for themselves. And 65 is the start of “old age” since most people become eligible for senior benefits at that point.

Each time we embark on one of these new categories—senior, adult, taxpayer—we must be socialized into this new role. Seniors must learn the ropes of Medicare, Social Security benefits, and getting a senior discount where they shop. When American males turn 18, they must register with the Selective Service System within 30 days to be entered into a database for possible military service. These government dictates mark the points at which we require socialization into a new category.

Mass Media

Mass media refers to the distribution of impersonal information to a wide audience, such as what happens via television, newspapers, radio, and the Internet. With the average person spending over four hours a day in front of the TV (and children averaging even more screen time), media greatly influences social norms (Roberts, Foehr, and Rideout 2005). People learn about objects of material culture (like new technology and transportation options), as well as nonmaterial culture—what is true (beliefs), what is important (values), and what is expected (norms).