

networks

There's More Online!

- CARTOON** The Looking-Glass Self
- CHART** Theoretical Perspectives: Socialization and the Mass Media
- IMAGE** Socialization Process: Play Stage
- SELF-CHECK QUIZ**



Reading HELPDESK



Academic Vocabulary

- distort
- anticipate

Content Vocabulary

- self-concept
- looking-glass self
- significant others
- role taking
- imitation stage
- play stage
- game stage
- generalized other
- "me"
- "I"

TAKING NOTES:

Key Ideas and Details

LISTING As you read about how the different theoretical perspectives view the socialization of the self, use a graphic organizer like this one to list the main assumptions of each approach.

Functionalism	Conflict Theory	Symbolic Interactionism
•	•	•
•	•	•
•	•	•

LESSON 2

Socialization and the Self

ESSENTIAL QUESTION • *What factors influence an individual's development?*

IT MATTERS BECAUSE

All three theoretical perspectives agree that socialization is needed if cultural and societal values are to be learned. Symbolic interactionism offers the most fully developed perspective for studying socialization. In this approach, the self-concept is developed by using other people as mirrors for learning about ourselves.

The Functionalist and Conflict Perspectives on Socialization

GUIDING QUESTION *How do functionalism and the conflict perspective explain socialization?*

Each of the three major theoretical perspectives provides insights into socialization. Yet functionalism and conflict theory approach socialization from a societal level. Functionalism examines how socialization helps maintain social institutions, while conflict theory focuses on its role in social control. Symbolic interactionism is interested in the role individuals and their social relationships play in socialization, so it allows for a more complete understanding than the other two.

Functionalism stresses the ways groups work together to create a stable society. Schools and families, for example, socialize children by teaching the same basic norms, beliefs, and values. If it were otherwise, society could not exist as a whole. It would be fragmented and chaotic.

The conflict perspective views socialization as a way of perpetuating the status quo. When people are socialized to accept their family's social class, for example, they help preserve the current class system. People learn to accept their social status before they have enough self-awareness to realize what is happening. Because they do not challenge their position in life, they do not upset the existing class structure. Consequently, socialization maintains the social, political, and economic advantages of the higher social classes.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Contrasting How do functionalists and conflict theorists differ in their explanations of socialization?

Symbolic Interactionism and Socialization

GUIDING QUESTION *How does symbolic interactionism explain socialization?*

In the early part of the twentieth century, George Herbert Mead and Charles Horton Cooley developed the symbolic interactionist perspective. They challenged the once widely held belief that human nature is biologically determined—that you are a certain way because you were born that way. For them, human nature is a product of society. Symbolic interactionism uses a number of key concepts to explain socialization. These concepts include:

- The self-concept
- The looking-glass self
- Significant others
- Role taking (the imitation stage, the play stage, and the game stage)
- The generalized other
- The “me” and the “I”

Self-Concept

Charles Horton Cooley developed the idea of the **self-concept** from watching his own children at play. Your self-concept is your image of yourself as having an identity separate from other people. Cooley realized that children interpreted how others reacted to them in many ways. For example, young children learn quickly that causing some disturbance when adult visitors are present turns attention from the guests to themselves. From such insights, children learn to judge themselves in terms of how they imagine others *will* react to them. Thus, other people serve as mirrors for the development of the self. Cooley called this way of learning the **looking-glass self**—a self-concept based on our idea of others’ judgments of us.

self-concept an image of yourself as having an identity separate from other people

looking-glass self an image of yourself based on what you believe others think of you

Looking-Glass Self

According to Cooley, we use other people as mirrors to reflect back what we imagine they think of us. In this view, the looking-glass self is the product of a three-stage process that is constantly taking place:

1. We imagine how we appear to others (our perception of how others see us).
2. We imagine the reactions of others to our (imagined) appearance.
3. We evaluate ourselves according to how we imagine others have judged us.

CARTOON >

THE LOOKING-GLASS SELF

According to Charles Horton Cooley, we develop our self-concept by imagining how others react to us.

► CRITICAL THINKING

1. Evaluating What perception does the man in the middle have of himself?

2. Identifying Cause and Effect What is the reaction of his friends? How might their reaction affect his self-concept?



Theoretical Perspectives

SOCIALIZATION AND MASS MEDIA

Each theoretical perspective has a unique view of the socialization process. This table identifies these views and illustrates the unique interpretation of each view with respect to the influence of the mass media on the socialization process.

Theoretical Perspective	Socialization Concepts	Examples
Functionalism	Stabilizes society	The Internet and television programs encourage social integration by exposing the entire society to shared beliefs, values, and norms.
Conflict Theory	Maintains status quo	Cable news shows and newspaper owners and editors exercise power by setting the political agenda for a community.
Symbolic Interactionism	Determines human nature	Through words and pictures, children's books expose the young to the meaning of love, manners, and motherhood.

► CRITICAL THINKING

1. Differentiating Which perspectives focus on maintaining society and which focus on how the mass media affect the development of the self?

2. Contrasting How do functionalists and conflict theorists differ in their explanations of the role of the media in the socialization process?

This is not a conscious process, and the three stages can occur in very rapid succession. The result of the process is a positive or negative self-evaluation. Suppose you have a new teacher you want to impress. You prepare hard for the next day's class. In class, as you are making a comment on the assignment, you have an image of your performance (stage 1). After finishing your comments, you think your teacher is disappointed (stage 2). Because you wanted your teacher to be impressed, you feel bad about yourself (stage 3).

Because the looking glass we use comes from our imaginations, it may be **distorted**. The teacher in this example may not have been disappointed at all. Unfortunately, the looking-glass process works even if we have distorted others' perceptions of us. If we incorrectly believe that a teacher, a date, or our parents dislike us, the consequences to us are just as real as if the distorted perception were true.

Significant Others

George Herbert Mead pointed out that some people are more important to us than others. The people whose judgments are most important to our self-concepts are called **significant others**. For a child, significant others are likely to include mother, father, grandparents, teachers, and playmates. Teenagers place heavy reliance on their peers. The variety of significant others is greater for adults, ranging from spouses, parents, and friends to ministers and employers.

Role Taking

As humans, we carry on silent conversations. That is, we think something to ourselves and respond internally to it. All of us do this when we predict the behavior of others. Through internal conversation, we can imagine the thoughts, emotions, and behavior of others in any social situation. **Role taking** allows us to see ourselves through the eyes of someone else. It allows us to take the viewpoint of another person and then respond to ourselves from that imagined viewpoint.

With role taking we can play out scenes in our minds and **anticipate** what others will say or do. For example, you might want to ask your teacher for an "A."

distort to twist out of the true meaning

significant others those people whose reactions are most important to your self-concept

role taking assuming the viewpoint of another person and using that viewpoint to shape the self-concept

anticipate to expect or predict

SELF-CONCEPT

The concept of self is important to both sociology and psychology. The two fields, however, approach the self from different perspectives. For symbolic interactionists, the creation of the self is a social process that is rooted in place and history. People develop their sense of self by interacting with other people in their environment and imagining how others perceive them. People living in different cultures or at different times in history would develop different self-concepts.

Many psychologists also believe that interactions with others in a person's environment shape a person's self-concept. Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, considered the self a social product. He also believed that personality is shaped by other people. Some psychologists believe that positive and negative rewards condition people to behave in certain ways. This conditioning shapes a person's sense of self. Other psychologists believe that people have an internal drive that pushes them to grow and improve. Like symbolic interactionists, these psychologists believe that the self-concept is created as people interact with others. Still other psychologists focus on genetics and environment as determinants of self. These psychologists believe that our biology and how our environment differs from the environments of others affect our temperament and how we view ourselves.



Sociologists see the creation of self as a social process.

► CRITICAL THINKING

- 1. Comparing** How are symbolic interactionists and some psychologists similar in their views of the self?
- 2. Contrasting** How do symbolic interactionists and some psychologists differ in the way they view the creation of the self?

imitation stage Mead's first stage in the development of role taking; children begin to imitate behaviors without understanding why

play stage Mead's second stage in the development of role taking; children act in ways they imagine other people would

game stage Mead's third stage in the development of role taking; children anticipate the actions of others based on social rules

If you could not mentally put yourself in your teacher's place, you would have no way to anticipate the objections that she might raise. But by role-playing her reaction mentally, you can be ready for those reactions and may justify your "A."

According to Mead, the ability for role taking is the product of a three-stage process. He called these the imitation stage, the play stage, and the game stage. In the **imitation stage**, which begins at around one and a half to two years, the child imitates (without understanding) the physical and verbal behavior of a significant other. This is the first step in developing the capacity for role taking.

At the age of three or four, a young child can be seen playing at being mother, father, police officer, teacher, or astronaut. This play involves acting and thinking as a child imagines another person would. This is what Mead called the **play stage**—the stage during which children take on roles of others one at a time.

The third phase in the development of role taking Mead labeled the **game stage**. In this stage, children learn to engage in more sophisticated role taking as they become able to consider the roles of several people simultaneously. Their games involve several participants, and there are rules designed to ensure that the behaviors of the participants fit together. All participants must know what they should do and what is expected of others. Imagine the confusion in a baseball game if young first-base players have not yet mastered the idea that the ball hit to a teammate will usually be thrown to them. In the second stage (the play stage), a child may pretend to be a first-base player one moment and a base runner the next. In the game stage, however, first-base players who drop their gloves and run to second base when the other team hits the ball will not remain in the game for very long. It is during the game stage that children learn to gear their behavior to the norms of the group.

Generalized Other

During the game stage, a child's self-concept, attitudes, beliefs, and values gradually come to depend less on individuals and more on general concepts. Being an honest person is no longer merely a matter of pleasing significant others such as one's mother, father, or minister. Rather, it begins to seem wrong *in principle* to be dishonest. As this change takes place, a **generalized other**—an integrated conception of the norms, values, and beliefs of one's community or society—emerges.

The "Me" and the "I"

Since the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment, Western society has emphasized the importance of the individual as an autonomous moral actor. In contrast, Asian cultures have traditionally placed a greater emphasis on the interconnectedness of people.

According to Mead, we can think of the self as having two parts: the "me" and the "I." The "**me**" is the part of the self created through socialization. It is constructed from the attitudes we develop by interacting with others. The "me" accounts for predictability and conformity in behavior. Yet much human behavior is spontaneous and unpredictable. An angry child may, for example, unexpectedly yell hurtful words at the parent whom he or she loves. To account for this spontaneous, unpredictable, often creative part of the self, Mead proposed the "**I**."

The "I" does not operate only in extreme situations of rage or excitement. It interacts constantly with the "me" in a kind of conversation as we conduct ourselves in social situations. According to Mead, the first reaction of the self comes from the "I." Before we act, however, this reaction is directed into socially acceptable channels by the socialized "me." When the "I" wants a piece of a friend's candy bar, the "me" reflects on the consequences of taking the candy without permission. Thus, the "I" normally takes the "me" into account before acting. The unpredictability of much human behavior demonstrates that the "me" is not always in control.

Mead chose the pronouns "I" and "me" because of their meanings in the English language. "I" is active—it is the self as subject: "I helped you." "Me" is the self as object: "You helped me." Mead stressed that the individual is not passive in the socialization process. The "I" evaluates other people's reactions to us and guides the "me" in better meeting expectations.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Making Connections How do the concepts developed by Cooley and Mead help explain the socialization process?



According to George Herbert Mead, the ability to take on roles is a three-stage process.

► CRITICAL THINKING

Assessing What stage of role taking is this child exhibiting? How do you know?

generalized other

integrated conception of the norms, values, and beliefs of one's community or society

"me" the part of the self formed through socialization

"I" the part of the self that accounts for unlearned, spontaneous acts

LESSON 2 REVIEW



Reviewing Vocabulary

- 1. Paraphrasing** What is the looking-glass self?
- 2. Describing** What is the significance of the generalized other?

Using Your Notes

- 3. Interpreting** Use your notes to explain why the symbolic interactionist approach allows for a more complete understanding of socialization than do functionalism and conflict theory.

Answering the Guiding Questions

- 4. Interpreting** How do functionalism and the conflict perspective explain socialization?
- 5. Synthesizing** How does symbolic interactionism explain socialization?

Writing Activity

- 6. Argument** Select one of the three theoretical perspectives and defend that perspective's view of socialization. Support your choice with specifics.