

10. Socialization is only an attempt

Institutions serve as the foundation of societies and rely on individuals to fulfill the roles necessary to sustain them. Through these institutions societies function to socialize their members, enabling individuals to recognize each other as members of a shared community. However, the success of socialization can vary across individuals, groups, and societies. When socialization fails or is less successful, individuals may be stigmatized with labels such as "crazy," "maladjusted," "deviant," or "criminal." In rare cases, individuals may experience extremely failed socialization, as is seen in the cases of feral children. This occurs when young children miss critical periods of socialization early in life due to extreme neglect or abandonment. Some cases involve children being confined to solitary rooms for extended periods with little human contact or social interaction. In other instances, children may survive with animals instead of humans for years. When critical periods of socialization are missed, it can be challenging to successfully resocialize an individual later in life. In many cases, these children are never quite able to catch up to their peers, even after reintegration into society is attempted.

In complex societies, competing socialization can arise, leading to tensions among the roles individuals are drawn towards. Multicultural societies offer various options for ways of living, creating further complexity. Consider an individual born into a bicultural family residing in a border city between nations, such as between San Diego and Tijuana. This individual speaks both English and Spanish, was raised in both cultures, and has family members who are fully Americanized and others who have never left Mexico. Such individuals often face difficult choices in determining which cultural identity to prioritize. While they may easily switch between cultural roles when present in one location or the other, it becomes more challenging when deciding where to permanently reside, which religion to follow, or whether to raise their children equally bicultural or allow them to adopt a primary culture. Competing socialization often leads to individuals feeling like they are betraying themselves or letting down certain parts of their social circle. Juggling social performances that may even contradict each other for different referent groups can create ongoing tension to varying degrees.

Successful socialization does not necessarily equate to an individual being pleased or satisfied with their situation in society. Societies often come with status hierarchies, which can be based on various factors such as caste, socio-economic class, religious affiliation, racial grouping, sexual orientation, and more. Many individuals throughout history did not choose to be born into a lower status or disadvantaged position but were socialized to internalize their roles associated with it, thus becoming successfully socialized into their society. For instance, "good slaves" may lead unpleasant lives, but if they do not dream of escaping their masters, they are the product of successful socialization. Similarly, women in patriarchal societies may be more or less happy with their subservient status, but that does not mean they do not understand the roles their society expects them to play. However, many individuals in such situations may not recognize the institutional coercion placing them in such situations and may instead consider it the only possibility due to some aspect of their own nature or the will of the gods. This is called alienation, a state of estrangement from a central aspect of oneself, as described by Karl Marx in his studies of laborers who were alienated

from their production. Many women in early twentieth-century America believed that homemaking, wife, and mother roles were the only things suited for them and saw signs of dissatisfaction as evidence of something wrong with themselves. Nevertheless, alienation is not unsuccessful socialization, but rather the result of heavy-handed socialization that is perhaps too successful.

Competing socialization and unsuccessful socialization are two different things. Unsuccessful socialization may lead to labeling someone as deviant or crazy, while competing socialization is more likely to result in what we refer to as an identity crisis. Even if a person is unhappy with their social position, if it's the only society they know and they have successfully internalized their role in it, they may not experience an identity crisis despite their frustrations about being lower on the status hierarchy. They may accept their position as a peasant or untouchable in a caste system in India. They may not like it, but they acknowledge it as their reality. On the other hand, living in competing socializations means having to make a choice between different social roles. This requires asking oneself "which one am I?" or more commonly phrased, "who am I?" This question about one's identity defines an identity crisis or identity struggle. However, as Berger and Luckmann pointed out, individualism becomes possible when people question their identity. While being fully socialized into a single society may spare a person the frustration of struggling with their identity, it also limits the level of individuality that the person may pursue. In homogenous cultures, many people live their entire lives without asking themselves who they are, as the roles provided by socialization render the question obsolete. It is no surprise that scholars find higher instances of identity crisis and the associated therapies and support systems needed to assist those experiencing identity crisis in societies where there is a greater level of competing socialization. The more cosmopolitan the society, with more multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious people living in it, the higher the chances that someone is raised with primary socialization that involves more than one set of institutions that demand them to play roles that often compete. This leads to role strain and, eventually, identity crisis.

Resocialization is a distinct concept from unsuccessful socialization and competing socializations. It involves a person adopting a new primary group and attempting to become more like them. For example, someone may convert to a different religion or get divorced after many years of marriage and need to find a new group of social contacts. Resocialization can also occur by force in a total institution, which is an all-encompassing environment like a prison or the armed forces. Erving Goffman studied mental asylums as examples of total institutions and noted that there are often resocialization rituals involved when entering them. These rituals involve stripping away a person's previous identity before taking on a new one. It is not surprising that these rituals are similar across different total institutions, often involving the shaving of hair, the confiscation of possessions, and the stripping of clothes. These actions reduce individuality and promote uniformity, often through the use of literal uniforms. Examples of total institutions include prisons, hospitals, the military, and some religious communities.

Resocialization requires top-down organizational moderation to break an individual's previous habits and patterns of thought and behavior. It is typically a difficult, and sometimes excruciating, process. People who undergo resocialization often experience culture shock and some degree of mourning before slowly finding themselves successfully reintegrating into a new social order. The process of resocialization facilitates the transition of a person's tastes and dispositions, which is not an easy task.

Another common feature of resocialization is the rewriting of one's personal narrative to align it with their present reality. For example, someone who has divorced and found a new partner may rationalize their past relationship by telling themselves that they were never truly in love with their ex-partner. Similarly, someone who has left a religion may emphasize the negative aspects of their previous religious community in order to make the features of their new religion appear more appealing. They may say something like "I was blind, but now I see."

Of the countless moments in our lives, we only remember a fraction of them. However, the ones we choose to connect as a trajectory in our life story are part of the process of building our identity. During resocialization, it is not uncommon for individuals to revise and redefine moments in their past to create a new narrative and find a different meaning in them.

In conclusion, socialization can result in either successful or failed outcomes, regardless of one's position in the social hierarchy. Competing socializations can also arise, causing identity crises. Resocialization may occur voluntarily or be imposed, often involving the re-narration of one's past. While primary socialization is more emotional and influential in shaping our social worlds, secondary socialization is never truly complete, as there are always new habits, behaviors, knowledge, and social contacts to explore. As we find our niches within society, we become experts in our subcultures or tribes, whether based on leisure activities, professions, or social groups. This expertise may not always involve high levels of skill, but it allows us to deepen our connection to our chosen subculture or tribe. Overall, socialization is an ongoing process that continues throughout our lives.

A successful socialization throughout our lives can lead to what Berger and Luckmann refer to as a "good death." A good death does not necessarily mean a painless or swift death after a long life. Rather, it refers to the psychological comfort that comes with belief in our cultural worldview; when it remains intact up until our last breath. For instance, a deeply religious person may find solace and comfort in the idea that their God is waiting for them just beyond their last heartbeat. However, a good death is not limited to religious ideologies. A secular scientist may find similar satisfaction in their awe of the mysteries of the universe or with the legacy of their publications and pupils.

A good death can still be excruciating, as exemplified by a religious person who does not believe in medical intervention and chooses to suffer from the pain of their terminal illness with satisfaction in their integrity, seeing it as a test or trial by God. Similarly, a person from a military culture may consider dying in battle to be the greatest honor and actually look forward to meeting that fate. The anxiety of mortality is exacerbated when we question our beliefs and worldviews as we near the end of our lives. Thus, a good death means that our symbolic universe makes sense to us and remains intact not only in our living but also in our dying.