

# Socialization Paper

Sociology 101

When I was in preschool, I had a friend named Christine. We enjoyed our friendship but whenever I wanted to do something that Christine did not, she would cross her arms roll her eyes and exhale in an audible "humpf!" She refused to articulate her objections. Instead, she would continue Humpf-ing until I acquiesced to her wishes. My parents and my mother in particular, disapproved of my friendship with Christine. In addition, when I began imitating her at home, my parents put a stop to her behavior. I remember with distinct clarity, standing in front of my mother with my arms crossed, eyes rolled, and a "Humpf" on my lips as a response to my parents instructing me to clean up the toys I had left strewn about the living room. I also remember my mother's eyes flying wide open at my actions and then squatting down in front of me, gripping my arm and in no uncertain terms, informing me that this behavior would not be tolerated.

This brief anecdote illustrates two of the three main **agents of socialization** that have socialized me throughout my life, making me who I am today. They are my parents, my peers, and the mass media. In my younger days, my parents and peers were the only agents of my socialization. However, as I learned to read, began watching television more actively, discovered Netflix, the third agent emerged.

I was born in Glendale, California; however, my early years were split between two houses in Highland Park. During the first phase of my life, my parents were my only influences. They taught me the basic mechanical skills needed for life in a civilized society. From them I learned how to walk, talk, read, write, tell time, etc. I was introduced to **sanctions** at a very early age. We have all experienced the anguished wails of a crying baby in a grocery store and a parent who simply ignores it. When I was that baby, crying in the store, my mother would try her best to make me stop but if her attempts failed, then she abandoned the cart and we went home. And that was that. This also formed the basis of my understanding of consequences.

During my sensorimotor stage, I was constantly exploring my world physically. My parents have told me that I had trouble with biting, that I was perpetually trying to understand the objects in the world around me by chomping on them.

Upon entering my preoperational stage, I began learning to talk. I did not learn to speak in anything approaching coherent statements until I was almost two. While I have very few specific memories from this period, Jean Piaget's theory on child development and socialization tells us that in this period children are very egocentric, viewing the world around them in terms of themselves.

My parents were very selective with what norms to instill in me. They covered most of the basic folkways such as, do not talk to strangers, do not eat with your hands, know when to use your indoor voice, and do not chew with your mouth full. However, they strategically omitted as well as counteracted certain norms such as, "boys play with toy trucks and girls play with toy ponies," or "boys wear blue and girls wear pink." I remember a pink shirt I had when I was about four, which I loved to wear all the time. In addition, I specifically recall one day coming home and telling my mother that I did not want to wear the shirt anymore because pink was a girl's color. As it had been in the case of the Humpf-ing, a stop was put to that. My mother and father both told me that there were no girl colors and boy colors, just colors. They told me whatever color I wanted to wear was fine and that was that. In this way, my parents put their own special brand on my socialization. At times, they fought against the social control that was trying to make me conform to society's wishes.

My parents also instilled strong mores in me, especially in my youth. Being moral was very important in my house. For example, lying was one of the worst offenses I could commit. And when I did, there was clear understanding that it was wrong. They gave me strong values

by teaching me what was right and wrong. When faced with moral questions, I often fall back on those simple lessons I learned as a child. Through gifts such as mores and values, my parents are responsible for the majority of my **cultural capital**. All the skills and advantages I have, I owe to them. They either gave them to me, or gave me the tools I needed to get them for myself.

Just before I went to second grade, my family moved from Highland Park into an apartment in Glendale. As a result, I changed schools, though I can recall no anguish at leaving my old school. Upon later reflection when I was much older, I realized that my family unit was my main support system. I relied very little on friends at school for acceptance. This is just another example of how great an influence my parents were in my socialization.

The **concrete operational stage** of my life coincided closely with my entry into the rigors of academia. Employing logical thinking and inductive reasoning, I climbed my way through the early grades. It was in this new stage and at this new school that I began to develop strong connections outside my family. I made friends with whom I spent every recess and lunch break.

In those early years, I recall a gradual yet distinct change in my perception of myself. In those early years of egocentrism, I did not care what anyone thought of me, partially because I was in the throes of my pre-operational stage and partially because my parents had conditioned me not to let the judgment of others inhibit me. However, when I was in sixth grade, I recall receiving a buzz-cut from my mother because I had broken our deal about taking care of my hair and keeping it combed and clean. The point is, that the dread I felt walking to school the next morning was perhaps the worst feeling I had experienced up to that point in my life. I explicitly remember the horror as I imagined my classmates seeing me with my new haircut and scornfully

asking, "What happened to him?" This ability to view myself through the eyes of a general society demonstrates a clear movement into the concrete operational stage through my recognition of the **generalized other**.

In middle school, this awareness developed into an acute and constant sense of what everyone around me thought of me. I spent many years fighting this oppressive constraint on my behavior, struggling to find a balance. My parents taught me from an early age not to care what others thought of me, but I had also been instructed in the value of being able to see things from someone else's perspective. One of my very earliest memories is of my father telling me that I must be able to walk a mile in someone else's shoes in order to understand them. My problem was that when I tried looking through someone else's eyes, I saw myself as dorky and uncool.

Because of this social awareness, my peers were a major influence on my socialization. In elementary school, we played handball and dodge ball as well as fantasy games and talked about topics of interest only to children. It was through them that I learned about life, as I had never known it. Up until that point, my only knowledge of childhood had been my own, but in talking with my friends I learned that not all families worked the way mine did. My friends came from many different cultures and as a result, many had different home lives. Some of their parents were divorced while some had both parents working. Some of my friends were wealthier than I was, and had many more toys and gadgets than I did. This was a lesson of socialization that has continued to resurface up through the present day.

At first, I looked at these different ways of life **ethnocentrically**. I viewed them through the standards of my own life. However, living in a place as diverse as Glendale, I have learned to practice **cultural relativism** and judge the cultures of others through the standards and rules of their own culture

It was also through my friends that I experienced my first **role conflict**. As a student, the teacher expected me to be quiet when told to, do my homework, and listen in class. However, as a friend and fellow student, my peers expected me to talk with them and not to tell the teacher on them when they broke the rules.

The time I entered high school is the time, which I feel I moved into the **formal operational stage** fully. I was able to grasp highly abstract concepts such as algebra and metaphors in my English classes. In high school I also experienced **role strain**. My classes became increasingly difficult and I found myself torn between different subjects in my role as a student. I would have to find a way to divide my time and study for all my subjects at once.

Looking back, I divide my high school career into two sections; before we moved to our new house, and after we moved. During my first two years of high school, we were still living in that same apartment. However, a family of four living in a two-bedroom apartment was starting to feel cramped. We found a wonderful home, but the problem was that it was about twenty minutes away from Glendale traveling by freeway. The move to our current home dramatically changed the way I viewed peers and social life.

Living so far away meant that I had to plan my whole day in advance and bring everything I would need for the entire day with me in the morning. This gave me a strong ability to think plans and ideas through and to find and fix possible problems I saw. This contributed greatly to my cultural capital. My friends had a much more pronounced influence on me after we moved because I was able to spend much less time with them. Having my options restricted so greatly by living far away from my school placed greater emphasis on the time I did get to spend with my friends.

My peers socialized me greatly in high school. They showed me what TV shows I should watch, what clothes I should wear, what organizations I should join and what new piece of technology I should beg my parents to buy for me. These lessons were usually taught by example but occasionally were administered through direct instruction.

It was in high school that I started paying attention to the more subtle social lessons that school had to teach me. One very important one was how to interact with authority figures, in this case teachers. Through my status as a student and years of practice, I have cultivated a knowledge of how to treat people possessing a more powerful status than mine. Rules such as not talking back and being respectful are lessons I have learned. In participating in group projects throughout high school, working with my peers taught me an important lesson about when to accommodate others and when to be steadfast and hold my position; to not giving in.

In my senior year of high school, I became a member of a subculture, the drama department. We were members of the larger culture, that of the student body, but we also had our own specific members and priorities. When a theater production came around, it became our top priority and we had to find time to squeeze in our homework.

Ever since I can remember watching television, I remember constant bombardment with commercials. From an early age, my parents taught me to ignore them and it was common policy in my house always to mute any commercials. However, ads and television figured greatly into how I perceived the role expectations that society had laid out for me.

On television and in movies, teenagers were always portrayed as having a poor relationship with their parents, stranded in a constant state of rebellion, and having their noses buried in their cell phones as well as their friends' lives.

Because of these omnipresent role expectations, instead of adhering to them I have strategically disobeyed them. I spend little to no time texting, and I converse with my parents several times a day. These negative expectations have caused me to rise above them and improve myself.

In books and TV shows, I have found role models. That is not to say that my life has been bereft of worthy role models but the media is a very big part of my life. I take traits that I like from characters on TV or in books and bring those specific characteristics into my life.

When I started watching television more frequently, it changed me. My parents had greatly regulated my TV habits in my youth. Being exposed to the adult and real world problems and actions of characters portrayed in TV shows socialized me to the appropriate responses to certain situations. It was like a glance into adult life with laugh tracks. I fully understood that television was not reality, but some of the lessons I learned watching TV have proved useful in my life.

My life has been full of agents of socialization. I would certainly not be the same without them. My parents taught me about right and wrong, how to walk and talk, and gave me the foundation to become the person I have grown into. My peers taught me how to live in the social world and gave windows into other walks of life outside of my own house. In addition, the media provided me with many role models from whom I stole traits I saw as valuable. These agents of socialization have shaped me and made me the person that I am today.