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978-0-521-29616-8 - From Student to Nurse: A Longitudinal Study of Socialization

Ida Harper Simpson

Excerpt

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PART I

**Professional socialization:  
theory and research problems**

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## 1. Professional socialization: perspectives and issues

Professional schools are charged with educating students to be skilled and committed workers who will faithfully do the work of their professions. In essence, their charge is to socialize students. But do they succeed? This monograph addresses that question in a study of socialization of student nurses. It begins by assessing the field of occupational socialization, which is divided in its answer. Until the publication of *Boys in White* (Becker et al., 1961), it was commonly assumed that professional schools socialized students for professional roles. *Boys in White*, which studied the educational experiences of medical students at the University of Kansas, challenged this assumption. It did so by taking issue with the findings of *The Student-Physician* (Merton et al., 1957), which reported research on the socialization of medical students at Cornell, Pennsylvania, and Western Reserve. The two books established different perspectives on occupational socialization. The perspective identified with *The Student-Physician* we call the *induction approach*, and that with *Boys in White*, the *reaction approach*. The induction approach, focusing on professional education itself, corresponds roughly to what Olesen and Whittaker (1970) call *assimilation* and other writers have called the *normative approach*. The reaction approach, centered on motivation, identities, and commitments, corresponds to what has been called the *situational approach* to professional education (Bloom, 1965:152–73; Elliott, 1972:76–93).

These different perspectives on occupational socialization are unlike different approaches in some other fields of inquiry in which different perspectives correspond to different theories of the same phenomena. The latter look at the same things but explain them differently. For example, different perspectives on delinquency offer different explanations of the same delinquent behavior (e.g., Hirschi, 1969). In contrast, the induction and reaction approaches to occupational socialization do not deal with the same phenomena. They study different *dependent* variables. But their separate subject matters are called by the same glo-

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[More information](#)4 *Professional socialization: theory and research*Table 1-1. *Differing elements of representative studies using the induction and reaction models*

Models and studies	Conditions	Outcomes
<i>Induction studies</i>		
Merton et al. (1957)	Sustained and growing involvement in a role	Acquisition of attitudes, skills, and behavior patterns of a role
Kadushin (1969)	Participation in activities of a role	Professional self-concept
<i>Reaction studies</i>		
Becker et al. (1961)	Objective options and students' evaluations of situations	Perspectives toward situations, long-range and immediate
Olesen and Whittaker (1968)	Reciprocities in contacts with faculty and in lateral roles	Strategies to deal with existential situations

bal term – socialization. Calling different things by the same global term has obscured their differences and confused their separate contributions.

The induction approach focuses on the acquisition of the professional role by students during professional education; it studies attitudes, values, and outlooks along with the skills and knowledge that constitute the professional role (Merton, 1957:40; Merton et al., 1957:287–8). The reaction approach looks at students but does not view them as acquiring a professional role. It looks at their identities and the commitments that sustain them during their professional education and motivate them to complete it and go on to professional practice. In contrast, the induction approach takes motivation for granted, not a subject of inquiry. The induction perspective sees students as being inducted into a role; the reaction perspective sees them reacting to educational experiences. To illustrate their essential differences, Table 1-1 summarizes how some representative studies view the conditions and outcomes of socialization.

The position this monograph takes is that the two perspectives need not compete. The main variables studied by both are essential aspects of socialization. Studying acquisitions of cognitive sets, apart from

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motivation to persist in a role, is insufficient as a view of socialization. Looking at motivation to pursue a role apart from the learning of outlooks that inform behavior once it is acquired is also insufficient. Each concern should be included in a model of professional socialization, and it is our objective to develop and apply a model that includes both.

This monograph will not use a global concept of socialization. It will examine dimensions of cognitive learnings and motivations stressed respectively by the two approaches. Including the different dimensions in a single model is not as straightforward as it might seem. The induction and reaction perspectives, in defining socialization and professional education around one or another variable, have raised some critical issues. Until the issues are resolved, they hinder the bringing together of the two perspectives' contributions in one conceptual scheme. The most basic issue is the questioning by the reaction approach of the main assumption of the induction approach: that behaviors learned in one situation are retained in different situations later. Corollary issues flow from this basic issue.

The reaction approach looks at behavior in specific situational contexts and at its variation from one context to another. Abstract norms that might apply across different situations are not its interest. Its proponents doubt that a professional role common to all practice situations is institutionalized or learned.

Another issue between the two approaches pertains to the question, who controls students' behavior? The reaction approach sees students as the main shapers of their own behavior the induction approach sees faculty as socializing agents.

The induction and reaction perspectives start from opposite assumptions, explicit or implicit, on virtually all questions related to occupational socialization. Because they start with different questions, to use the findings of one approach to answer questions studied by the other only joins the issues that divide research in the field. Studies in one tradition cannot invalidate findings of the other. The position of this monograph is that each has contributed to understanding occupational socialization and their respective contributions need to be recognized and brought together. In this way the issues that confront the field can be dealt with. The model we develop is an attempt to bridge the two perspectives, and we will use it to address empirically the main issues that now have the field at an impasse.

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The empirical problem of this monograph is to describe socialization of student nurses. We ask whether the educational program of a nursing school imparts cognitive orientations that persist across status transitions, and whether it develops identities and commitments to nursing that support the transition of the student into the professional role of the nurse. These are the two most essential questions about socialization: the development of cognitive sets and motivations and their persistence from one situation to another.

As we use the term, *occupational socialization* includes the imparting of skills and knowledge to do the work of an occupation, of orientations that inform behavior in a professional role, and of identities and commitments that motivate the person to pursue the occupation. We see socialization occurring during professional education. It adjusts students to their education, but unlike adjustments to specific situations, it persists. Its persistence across status transitions and situational changes is one of its distinguishing features. Another is its generality. The knowledge and skills, orientations, and motivations transcend situational constraints, applying to the occupational role in varied settings. Knowledge and skills may be learned without acquiring orientations or developing an occupational identity and motivations; identities and motivations may be developed without acquiring occupational orientations; or orientations may be acquired without developing motivation to pursue the occupation. But knowledge and skills are prerequisites for acquisition of enduring orientations and motivations; one cannot do the occupation's work without its technical knowledge and skills. Knowledge and orientations are cognitive, informing one how to behave. Identities and motivations relate the person to the occupation. Knowledge, orientations, and motivations are distinct components. Only when all three have developed is a person fully socialized.

The contributions of the induction and reaction perspectives are important to the conceptual model we develop to study the socialization of student nurses. We begin by examining the two perspectives to highlight their contributions and to set forth issues in the field with which our own model must deal. Part I of the book examines the induction and reaction perspectives and develops our conceptual model. Parts II and III apply the model to data from a school of nursing to examine its utility, and Part IV discusses implications of the findings and suggests further refinement.

### The induction approach

The seminal work that develops conceptually the induction model of socialization is that by Merton in *The Student-Physician* (1957:3–80). Because of the prominence of Merton's statement and the studies in *The Student-Physician* that draw on it, this approach has been termed the Columbia view of socialization (Gouldner, 1962:207). The induction approach did not begin or end with these studies; it also characterized such earlier studies as Donovan's exploration of the waitress (1920), the saleslady (1929), and the schoolma'am (1938); Dornbusch's (1955) analysis of coast-guard cadet training; and Sutherland's (1937) study of the professional thief, as well as later studies such as those by Sherlock and Morris (1967) and Kadushin (1969).

The induction approach rests on several assumptions: (1) A profession is institutionalized in society and a professional subculture develops around it (Merton, 1957:71). (2) The main repository of this culture is the professional school and its faculty, who are charged by their parent profession with instructing students in the knowledge and skills of professional practice and, through their contact with students, with introducing them to the norms and lore of the profession. (3) The professional school is a subsystem of the larger professional system. Faculty and student roles are tied together through complementary interests. Students look to faculty and accept faculty definitions of professional culture and faculty expectations of how to become professional. (4) Matriculation in a professional school places students in the status of student-professionals; faculty look upon them as professionals in the making – a transitional and developing status – and treat them accordingly (Bloom, 1965:154–5). Given these assumptions, studies employing the induction approach analyze students' experiences as occurring within the context of the professional system and socializing students in professional culture. Socialization is seen as involving the acquisition of attitudes and values along with the skills and behavior patterns that constitute the professional role (Merton, 1957:40; Merton et al., 1957:287–8). Socialization processes include direct learning through didactic teaching and indirect learning through example and sustained involvement with others in the professional subsystem (Merton, 1957:41–2). Students gradually acquire the professional culture through cumulative learning that develops them into “full” professionals.

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The induction model takes a professional outcome for granted, though recognizing that it may be incomplete, and sees the problem of socialization as a matter of transmitting professional culture to students who are eager to learn it. The transmission occurs through role relationships in which students learn the expectations of professional roles. The professional culture is implicitly conceived as a coherent cognitive set of knowledge, skills, and norms that can be taught, learned, and carried into professional practice. Socialization can be assessed by observing the growth of orientations that are consistent with the expectations built into student roles. Variations or failures of socialization within a particular school arise from inconsistent expectations of different teachers, from incongruities of classroom teaching and students' experiences in professional role-sets, or from views brought by students to their education that are incompatible with what they are taught.

In the induction model, the development of orientations by a professional school appears to rest on two main conditions of the education program: (1) that definitions of professional roles be upheld by faculty in their teaching and their relations with students and by other significant professional role alters with whom students interact, and (2) the provision of training experiences arranged to enable students to see the connection of the skills they learn to the enactment of the professional role. When these conditions are satisfactorily met, a school can successfully induct students into its profession.

Proponents of the induction approach do not assert, as is sometimes said, that all students in all professional schools become fully socialized into professional roles. Success of socialization depends on the educational program of a school, its fit with the professional culture, and the opportunities it provides for students to assimilate professional-role expectations through experiences that occur within professional-role contexts or can be related to such contexts. Neither does the model assume that the outcome of socialization is to make all professionals like-minded (Dornbusch, 1955:316); or that the norms learned are absolutes with a narrowly constricted range of possible applications and no alternatives (Fox, 1957:235-9; Merton, 1957:76); or that the norms are fully internalized (Merton, 1957:71-9); or that professional practice may not modify the behaviors and values the students have learned (Dornbusch, 1955:321).

The model's most basic tenet is that social learning occurs during professional education - norms are imparted, attitudes are formed to

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accord with the norms, an appreciation is gained of ends toward which the profession's work is directed – and that these acquisitions develop a professional self constituted by a “more or less consistent set of dispositions which govern . . . behavior in a wide variety of professional . . . situations” (Merton et al., 1957:287). Students build backgrounds of experiences having elements in common with those of the seasoned professionals with whom the students later will join in a community of purpose and common ways of conduct. Students' normative acquisitions, like the knowledge and skills they learn, are carried into professional practice and are used to deal with the role demands of professional work. Proponents of the induction approach, although they have not studied later professional practice, have assumed that the persistence of these norms under varying conditions of professional work is a source of continuance and stability of the profession.

The induction model allows generalization from one socialization situation to another. Processes of induction into occupational groups are presumably the same in essence, though with variations among different programs and occupational roles. This view of induction, however, does not take account of the fact that student-professional roles and professional roles for which students are being trained are embedded in structures of power. Differences in power of the roles may well affect the persistence of what students learn. In its attention to induction, the approach has assumed, not studied, the persistence of student learnings in their work as professionals. Similarly, in its attention to the professional role, the model has assumed but has not systematically studied the student's motivation to pursue the professional role.

**The reaction approach**

There are variants of the approach we call reaction, but they are alike in viewing professional education with assumptions very different from those of the induction approach. Writings by Becker and Olesen and Whittaker are perhaps the clearest examples of this approach. Studies using the reaction approach do not conceive a professional school as a subsystem of its parent profession (Bloom, 1965:154); instead, they analyze the professional school as an independently organized social unit. Neither do they regard the professional school as a social system with its positions – students and faculty – bound together through mutual and complementary interests and role expectations. Instead, they



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see students - and probably would see faculty members if they were studied - as separate groups, each distinguished by common objectives and by power to act collectively in furtherance of their objectives. Common objectives arise when individuals hold the same position in a social organization, thus subjecting them to the same contingencies as they seek to realize common goals. Students' common interests are reinforced through long-range career goals and through their being educated as cohorts. Holding interests in common and having their individual situations within the school based on the same organizational forces, students share experiences; their interactions with each other breed common outlooks that bind them together as a student group and provide perspectives from which they view their training. The reaction model assumes that to understand the behavior of individuals, the appropriate units of study are the individuals as they are situated. Their situations may, of course, include membership in a group that shapes their behavior and outlooks.

Followers of the reaction model question the basic assumptions of the induction model. They doubt that a professional role is institutionalized in society (Bucher and Strauss, 1961), that it is regulated by cultural norms shared by its practitioners, and that these norms transcend the social contexts where professional roles are enacted (Freidson, 1970). In addition, they question whether standards upheld by faculty and other role alters are uniform within or across schools of a profession (Bucher and Strauss, 1961). Writers emphasize instead that the schools of a given profession are differently organized and serve different populations (cf. Mumford, 1970). They do not think that even within one school the standards stressed by the faculty are in fact mirrored in student perspectives. They see students' views as adaptive responses to their subordinate position in professional schools, where they are regarded and treated as students, not as junior colleagues (Bloom, 1965:152).

A main difference between the two approaches hinges on the question of social control of behavior, its locus and its effects on the orientations and behavior of the student and the certified professional. The induction model pictures a profession as a solidary system with social control arising from shared outlooks and mutual interests. The professional school is conceived as both a part and an agency of the profession, charged with inducting students into it in a way that ensures its continuous structure and function. Studies of professional education

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employing the induction approach are grounded on the supposition that students learn norms and values and that as practitioners these norms and values guide them to act in ways consistent with the institutionalized role of the occupation.

The reaction model, in contrast, conceives social control as a matter of power. Behavioral options increase power; contingencies on behavior reduce it. Contingencies are constraints. They arise from demands on students *as* students and from roles in other systems of action (Davis and Olesen, 1963). These constraints bear directly on students to limit their ability to act in accordance with their long-range objectives (Becker et al., 1961) and to achieve a sense of well-being and comfort (Davis and Olesen, 1963; Olesen and Whittaker, 1968). Positions differ in the behavioral options they provide. When individuals change positions, their options change. They may gain or lose power. Changes in constraints and options require new adaptations. Previous ways of dealing with problems, called perspectives by Becker et al. (1961), are unlikely to work because the conditions to which they were adapted have changed. The reaction model sees learning to behave in a status as occurring after, not before, the individual occupies the status. Its exponents do not consider adequate or useful the assumption of the induction model that a professional product is produced during professional education (Olesen and Whittaker, 1968:5–6, 298; Becker et al., 1961:420).

Proponents of the reaction approach do not deny that students are educated in attitudes besides learning skills and knowledge (Freidson, 1970:88; Becker et al., 1961:425), but they do not think the attitudes and behaviors learned during professional education are the major influences on the behavior of practitioners, whose power and status differ markedly from those of students. This doubt challenges the very significance of studies of professional socialization conceived as the induction of students into professions (Olesen and Whittaker, 1970:179–221). To substantiate this line of argument, Freidson (1970:89) summarizes findings of research on physicians, lawyers, and correctional caseworkers to show that “There is some very persuasive evidence that ‘socialization’ does not explain some important elements of professional performance half so well as does the organization of the immediate environment.” The focus of the reaction approach is on *students*, not on the professional role. Topics studied include the adaptation of students to the demands of the curriculum (Becker et al., 1961) and the emergent identi-