# 1 Introduction

This Element surveys knowledge about the socialization process – that is, the ways in which individuals come to behave in accord with the standards, beliefs, values, and actions of their social group. Socialization happens whenever individuals enter a new social group – when, for example, they start a new job, become a parent, emigrate to a new country, or move into late adulthood. In this Element we focus, however, on the most important and most studied example of socialization – the preparation of children to successfully enter a world beyond the family. Noteworthy is the fact that socialization in all contexts is not a one-way street involving the straightforward transmission of standards and values from those who are more experienced to those who are less experienced (Kuczynski & Mol, 2015). Rather, new group members construct values from their socialization experiences. Additionally, new group members may alter the attitudes and behavior of older members of the group. In the case of the family, for example, children may urge their parents to stop using their cell phones while driving or to stop smoking or engaging in other unhealthy behaviors, or to change rules and requirements to something the children find more reasonable. It should be noted as well that where more than one socialization agent is involved, discrepant information about appropriate behavior may occur, requiring children to resolve the discrepancy.

In addition to the acquisition of standards of behavior, children need to learn how to control their emotions, including fear, anger, frustration, sadness, and excessive displays of pleasure. These emotions interfere with the display of socially appropriate actions and therefore must be managed. Also learned during the course of socialization are ways of resolving conflict, as well as attitudes toward relationships with others. Notably, socialization includes both the intentional efforts of socialization agents to guide children toward the acquisition of desired characteristics and behavior, as well as the influence that socialization agents unconsciously exert on children's development through the conditions they unwittingly create or the example they inadvertently provide. Moreover, socialization efforts and influences may be more or less effective in fostering children's positive development and adjustment (or, when very ineffective, children's maladjustment). A major goal for socialization theory and research has thus been to characterize how successful socialization of children occurs.

## 1.1 The Centrality of Parents

Several years ago, Harris (1995) created a stir among developmental scientists when she argued that groups external to the family had more influence on

socialization of children than did parents. Scarr (1992), in a similar vein, had suggested that parental rearing had little impact on children's development unless it was extreme in its content. In fact, these were not totally novel ideas. Piaget (1932), for example, maintained that parents had a lesser role to play in moral development than did peers. This was because the authoritarian relationship children had with their parents meant that there was little opportunity for children to learn the importance of considering different points of view, an essential aspect of development.

The assertions of Harris and Scarr were important in reminding developmentalists about the wide range of influences on children's socialization. Indeed, parents are far from the only agents of socialization. Children themselves, of course, have an impact on their own socialization, not only because of their genetic predispositions but also because, as described earlier, they construct values and beliefs rather than simply taking over what they are being taught. Children are also exposed to siblings, grandparents, teachers, and peers from an early age, as well as to nonparental caregivers in the home. Finally, of course, and not insignificantly, television, social media, and video games can make significant contributions to the socialization process.

There are many good reasons, however, why parents are more important than any of these other socialization agents. First, parents are present in children's lives from the moment of birth (and even earlier), and thus relationships with parents are the earliest bonds that children form. Moreover, in most societies, responsibility for child care is formally assigned to parents or close relatives, often with legislated rights and responsibilities and with a reluctance on the part of the social group to intervene except in extreme cases of neglect or abuse. Moreover, whereas relationships with teachers and peers can be terminated, those with parents (usually) cannot. Another reason for parental prominence in childrearing is that parents have more opportunity to monitor their children on a continuing basis. Thus, they are in the best position to know what their children are doing and thinking and to react accordingly. Perhaps the most important reason for parents to have a leading position with respect to socialization is that they have to live with their children and interact with them on a continuing basis. Life is more pleasant when children are well behaved and cooperative, and so the motive to facilitate good behavior and cooperation is substantial.

### 1.1.1 Evolution of Parental Socialization

Evolutionary theory provides another way of understanding the primacy of parents and the family in the socialization process. Socialization, in the sense

of an extended period of immaturity during which children receive intensive care and guidance in preparation for maturity, can be viewed as an evolutionary adaptation. Fossil evidence indicates that a substantial increase in brain size occurred during human evolution, with cranial capacity more than tripling in size. This dramatic increase in brain size is largely attributed to the growing social complexity of human society, which included competition and cooperation over resources and status, within and between social groups (Flinn, 2017; Flinn et al., 2005). Larger brains, with bigger cortexes, enabled more advanced cognitive abilities, particularly social cogitation and communication skills, which were vital for successfully coping with these social challenges. However, due to the limitations of the woman's birth canal size, expanded brain sizes meant more altricial infants – that is, infants physically immature and helpless at birth, with substantial brain growth and maturation occurring postnatally. Moreover, the social complexities of group living required the teaching and fostering of children's social competencies so that they could cope with the challenges they were likely to face later on. An extended period of socialization is therefore an evolutionary adaptation which enabled considerable brain development during childhood, the protection and nurturing of physically immature children, and the appropriate preparation of the young for the complexities of social life (Flinn, 2017; Flinn et al., 2005).

Dependent children require intensive caregiving over many years. In our evolutionary history, such caregiving of the young was primarily provided by the family which, in addition to mothers, included fathers as well as other relatives. Notably, whereas mothers have absolute certainty that their children are their biological offspring, fathers do not. Male–female pair bonding is therefore seen as an important evolutionary adaptation that increased fathers' certainty regarding their biological paternity, and which therefore facilitated paternal investment in caring for their young (Bugental et al., 2015; Flinn, 2017). Caring for and nurturing offspring is crucial for children's reproductive fitness, but can be demanding and taxing for caregivers. Humans (both females and males) have therefore evolved a strong motivation to care for children. This evolved tendency is rooted in human biology, including brain functioning and hormones (see Section 8 of this Element).

## 1.2 Internalization

Many socialization theorists see internalization of values and attitudes as the primary goal of childrearing. Children must comply with societal values and directives not because they fear punishment for unacceptable behavior or because they hope for reward in the case of acceptable behavior, but because

they have come to see the inherent correctness of a particular point of view or requirement. Attribution theorists (Lepper, 1983), calling on the "minimal sufficiency principle," have argued that internalization is facilitated when socialization involves discipline that is just sufficient to produce positive social behavior –that is, uses the optimal amount of pressure: not too little (as no change in behavior will occur), yet not too much (as no internalization will occur). When the pressure to conform is no more than necessary to obtain compliance, then the resulting positive behavior will less likely be attributed to external pressures. Instead, it would more likely be attributed to a belief in the intrinsic correctness of the behavior. As a result, even in the absence of surveillance, the behavior will endure.

Social Determination Theory (SDT) has much to say about internalization (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The proposal here is that, rather than being merely absent or present, there is a continuum of internalization. This continuum begins with external reasons or motivations for behavior – fear of punishment or hope of reward. Next is introjected – the achievement of self-approval by pleasing others or avoiding shame or guilt. Finally are identified – action taken in accord with personally important and valued goals, and integrated – adoption of a behavior that is in accord with a broader belief system about the self and that thus contributes to a coherent and cohesive system of values. One important feature of socialization that is central to internalization according to SDT is autonomy support. Thus, children are more likely to move closer to the integrated end of the internalization continuum when their need for autonomy is being supported. Autonomy-supportive agents provide meaningful rationales for limits and demands, give choice and opportunities for initiative-taking within these limits, and acknowledge children's feelings (Grolnick & Pomerantz, 2009; Grolnick & Ryan, 1989). More generally, autonomy-supportive agents are empathic, descriptive (i.e., informational instead of evaluative), and take the perspective of the child. They also provide opportunities for the child to actively participate in decision-making or problem-solving, instead of being intrusive, dominating, and pressuring.

Another conceptualization of internalization comes from social cognitive approaches to development and, in particular, from the work of Vygotsky (1978). Vygotsky argued that higher skills, both cognitive and social, are acquired in interactions with more knowledgeable others. The adult (or more knowledgeable person), working within the child's current level of understanding or "zone of proximal development," gradually guides that child to adopt more advanced ways of thinking. This occurs by creating shared understanding (intersubjectivity) regarding the matter at hand (task, topic, etc.), enabling the

child to adopt and internalize the adult's more complex way of thinking and reasoning.

## 2 Overview

This Element begins with a detailed description of how theories of socialization have developed over many years to yield current ways of viewing the socialization process – ways that often lead to contradictory recommendations with respect to effective parenting. We suggest that these contradictions can be resolved by positing that socialization happens in many different contexts or domains that require different forms of intervention. We next move to a discussion of how parents' beliefs about themselves and their children influence their socialization practices, and provide a brief survey of the important role played by siblings and peers in the socialization process. This is followed by a discussion of how culture and biology facilitate further understanding of socialization. Last, we offer some final observations about the socialization process.

## 3 Approaches to Understanding Socialization: How Did We Get from Freud to Present-Day Formulations?

Studies of socialization have been guided by many different theoretical formulations, not all of which appear to be compatible. In this section we first describe the major theoretical approaches to socialization. In Section 4 we attempt to bring together research findings they have generated in an organized manner, which can help resolve some of the contradictions they appear to pose.

### 3.1 Psychoanalytic Theory

Modern views of childrearing can largely be traced back to Freud. In *Civilization and its discontents* (S. Freud, 1930), Freud argued that children experience anger and resentment in the course of being taught acceptable behavior if strict demands are placed on them. Fear of abandonment or, at least, loss of love, however, keeps them from expressing their hostility. Instead, they repress the hostility and adopt parental rules as their own – that is, they internalize the rules. This internalization includes self-punishment or guilt, which motivates adoption of parental standards and promotes acceptable behavior even when sources of external disapproval and punishment are no longer present. An important feature of Freud's thinking was the emphasis on fear of loss of love as a primary motivator for adopting parental directives. Another important feature was that these directives were adopted without change: values

and attitudes were seen to be transmitted to, rather than constructed by, the child.

Freud's thinking became particularly influential in North America after he accepted an invitation to lecture at Clark University in 1909. The ideas he presented had considerable appeal because of their richness and complexity, although the reception among practitioners was more positive than that among academics (Sears, 1975). In the 1930s, psychoanalysis became a North American specialty when many analysts were forced to flee from Germany.

## 3.2 Behaviorism

In academic circles, ideas relevant to children's social development were more likely to involve classical conditioning, with an emphasis on behavior. Thus, the works of Pavlov and Watson composed the dominant approach. Watson (1925) maintained that the ability to modify behavior through environmental manipulation and, in particular, through the process of classical conditioning, was virtually boundless. He wrote:

> Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed and my own world to bring them up in and I'll guarantee to bring any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select – doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief and, yes, even beggar-man and thief – regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocation, and race of his ancestors. (1925, p. 104)

The behaviorist approach was welcomed in the North American context given that North America, and the United States in particular, was a society founded on rugged individualism and focused on action as opposed to thinking and reflection (Buss, 1975). Behaviorism also appealed to academic psychologists because it was based on carefully conducted research. Behaviorism flourished with the work of Skinner, who focused on instrumental or operant conditioning and the role of reinforcement in this learning. Skinner also continued with the strong emphasis in North American psychology on the importance of studying behavior rather than the mind.

## 3.3 Social Learning Theory

Hullian learning theory provided a further guide for the role of conditioning principles in development. Hull's approach centered on the learning of associations between unconditioned and conditioned stimuli, and on drive reduction as the primary reinforcement for behavior. It was this approach that provided the framework for social learning theory.

Psychoanalytic practitioners argued that the principles of Freudian theory were not amenable to scientific testing and had to be assessed through the free association of patients undergoing psychoanalysis or through the observation of children during structured play sessions. However, a group of influential researchers located at the Yale Institute of Human Development tried to test psychoanalytic hypotheses by translating them into the concepts of conditioning and drive reduction (e.g., Dollard et al., 1939). A number of corresponding features of the two approaches made this possible. Thus, drive reduction was important for both theories. Freud's pleasure principle and reinforcement were similar. So too were the concepts of displacement (focusing on a new but similar object or goal because the original is too anxiety-provoking) and generalization (responding in the same way to similar stimuli). Additionally, but not surprisingly, similar behavioral outcomes were the object of their interest, viz., dependency, aggression, and identification or incorporation of parental standards (Grusec, 1992).

Sears (e.g., 1963) argued that mothers become secondarily reinforcing because of their association with primary drive reduction in the form of feeding and provision of physical comfort. In this way a dependency motive develops. Sears went further, suggesting that because young children are not able to discriminate between themselves and their mothers, they reproduce or imitate her behavior to satisfy their dependency needs. Unclear, however, was why mothers should be imitated when dependency needs were not activated, and so this particular set of hypotheses was abandoned (Grusec, 1992). Nevertheless, the research undertaken by Sears and his colleagues provided the base for future investigations of childrearing. Sears et al. (1957), for example, interviewed 379 mothers about their childrearing practices and the effects of these practices. They focused on discipline, which included punishment, withdrawal of love, and reasoning, and found that children's conscience or internalization of parental standards of conduct was higher in those whose mothers used withdrawal of love and who were warm – that is, had love they could withdraw. Sears et al. suggested that withdrawal of love required the child to imitate maternal behavior to compensate for its loss. The topics Sears et al. studied – dependency, aggression, conscience development, and sex-role behaviors – remain topics of interest to this day.

### 3.3.1 Bidirectionality

Another contribution made by Sears was to point out that the relationship between mother and child is bidirectional (Sears, 1951). Not only do parents have an effect on their children's development, children's behavior also has an

impact on what their parents do: both parents and children are subject to the laws of learning. This idea was emphasized again in Bell's (1968) classic paper, which illustrated how links between parenting and child outcomes typically interpreted as parental effects could just as easily be viewed as stemming from child effects. Nevertheless, this is a feature of socialization about which researchers still need to be reminded (Kuczynski & Mol, 2015), no doubt because they are more interested in giving advice to parents about how to affect the behavior of children than they are in giving advice to children about how to affect the behavior of their parents (Davidov et al., 2015). Parents do a much better job, however, when they understand how they themselves are affected by the actions of their children.

### 3.3.2 Other-oriented Induction

Further elaboration of Sears' categories of discipline was provided by Hoffman (1970). He distinguished power assertion, love withdrawal, and induction as features of discipline, with induction being the provision of explanation and appeals to the child's pride and desire to be mature. A particularly important aspect of discipline was "other-oriented" induction or pointing out the negative impact of the child's behavior on another person. In a review of existing studies, Hoffman found that, on average, power assertion in the form of physical punishment, deprivation of privileges, and application of force or threats of those reactions was negatively related to the development of conscience or internalization, whereas withdrawal of love was unrelated. Induction, particularly other-oriented induction, was positively related to conscience development. Warmth was also a predictor of positive outcomes. These relations held for mothers but not for fathers, at least in the few studies that were then available.

Hoffman proposed that power-assertive discipline techniques make the child angry because they challenge the child's autonomy, as well as provide a model of antisocial behavior. A power-assertive approach to discipline also focuses the child's attention on the self rather than the individual being harmed, thereby failing to make use of the child's empathic ability. Love withdrawal can be more effective, but generates anxiety that can detract from the child's ability to internalize the message. Other-oriented induction, in contrast, utilizes the child's empathic ability by maintaining focus on the other, is potentially less anxiety-provoking, and provides information about how one should behave and why. Hoffman (1982) noted, however, that a moderate level of power assertion or disapproval is required to gain the child's attention and ensure the message contained in induction is heard.

### 3.4 Social Cognitive Theory

Sears had great difficulty explaining how children learn new responses by imitating their mothers. Skinner (1953) had similar problems with imitation and had resorted to suggesting that children learn novel responses by successive approximation, a process requiring that elements of a new response be reinforced as they grew closer and closer in form to the desired outcome. Bandura and Walters (1963) noted, however, that this was an unnecessarily cumbersome approach to learning: no one would teach an adolescent to drive a car by means of trial-and-error procedures, nor would one entrust a firearm to an armed services recruit without a demonstration of how it should be handled. Noting that the learning of new responses could be achieved simply through observing the behavior of others, even if observed actions were not enacted, they maintained that observational learning was a form of learning that did not need to rely on other principles of learning. Indeed, they suggested that observational learning had a primary position among mechanisms of learning, given its efficiency as a way of teaching new behaviors.

Bandura and Walters referred to the centrality of observational learning as reflecting a "sociobehavioristic" approach, thereby emphasizing the fact that this form of learning was a social process. The label was modified again as Bandura (Bandura, 1986) began to refer to the approach as a social cognitive one. This change in labeling was appropriate, given that events required for successful learning through observation went beyond behavior, including attention to a model's actions, retention of viewed material in memory in either an imaginal or verbal form, conversion of these representations into actions similar to those originally modeled, and, finally, an incentive to motivate the matching of behavior. The emphasis on cognition can also be seen in Bandura's explanation for internalization or the shifting of control over behavior from external agents to the self. He argued that by observing models, being taught directly, and experiencing reactions of others to their behavior, children learn to self-regulate or set standards for their own behavior. They do not passively take over the model's standards but, instead, make choices. Thus, value systems are constructed, not transmitted as Freud and Sears had maintained. Variables affecting children's choice of what to model include how similar they see themselves to the model, the extent to which they see behavior as a function of their own efforts and abilities, and their perceived competence to reproduce the model's behavior.

### 3.5 Applied Behavior Analysis and Coercion Theory

Bandura remains a prominent figure in psychology. Additionally, however, researchers and practitioners continued to apply straightforward reinforcement

principles to a wide variety of learning situations, including the modification of psychotic behavior (Ayllon & Michael, 1959), the use of tokens to reward classroom learning (Bijou & Baer, 1961), and treatment of autistic children (Lovaas et al., 1973).

Patterson and his colleagues produced impressive results in their interventions directed at antisocial and delinquent behavior. In what they label "coercion theory," they describe the bidirectional nature of troubled mother–child interactions, with challenged mothers unintentionally reinforcing children's negative or difficult behaviors by giving in when those negative behaviors reach an intolerable level. Children escalate behavior to maximum intensity early in the exchange, whereas mothers escalate their behavior more slowly and then withdraw as early as possible. In this way mothers negatively reinforce their children's antisocial behavior by ceasing their own, and so they inadvertently train their children to be more aversive by ceasing their own aversive behavior (Patterson, 1982). In this analysis children are clearly active seekers and selectors of caregiver interventions, as opposed to passive recipients of interventions. Another feature of Patterson's approach was his dismissal of the need for a concept of internalization. Patterson (1997), for example, suggested that the complexity of moment-to-moment experience makes it unlikely that the experience can be mentally processed and, therefore, internalized.

Interventions based on principles of behavior analysis continue to be successful in the treatment of antisocial and delinquent behavior (Forgatch & Gewirtz, 2017), with an emphasis on positive and negative reinforcement, limit setting or discipline, monitoring, family problem-solving, and positive involvement with the child. The use of these techniques avoids coercive interactions and negative reinforcement, which are features of many troubled families.

## 3.6 Attachment Theory

Object relations theory (Klein, 1952), an offshoot of psychoanalytic thinking, provided the base for attachment theory. According to Klein, early family experiences shape social development, but such shaping is motivated by the need for contact and formation of relationships with others, rather than sex, aggression, or secondary drives (as would be suggested by psychoanalytic or social learning theories). Theorizing about this basic need to form relationships accorded with the work of Lorenz (1970) on imprinting, which showed that many bird species instinctively bond with the first moving object that they see. Added to this was the research of Harlow (1958), demonstrating that rhesus monkeys preferred to cling to cloth-covered surrogate mothers over