

Socialization: The Internalization of Reality

PETER L. BERGER AND THOMAS LUCKMAN

PRIMARY SOCIALIZATION

The individual ... is not born a member of society.

Every individual is born into an objective social structure within which he encounters the significant others who are in charge of his socialization. These significant others are imposed upon him. Their definitions of his situation are posited for him as objective reality. He is thus born into not only an objective social structure but also an objective social world. The significant others who mediate this world to him modify it in the course of mediating it. They select aspects of it in accordance with their own location in the social structure, and also by virtue of their individual, biographically rooted idiosyncrasies. The social world is “filtered” to the individual through this double selectivity. Thus the lower-class child not only absorbs a lower-class perspective on the social world, he absorbs it in the idiosyncratic coloration given it by his parents (or whatever other individuals are in charge of his primary socialization). The same lower-class perspective may induce a mood of contentment, resignation, bitter resentment, or seething rebelliousness. Consequently, the lower-class child will not only come to inhabit a world greatly different from that of an upper-class child, but may do so in a manner quite different from the lower-class child next door.

It should hardly be necessary to add that primary socialization involves more than purely cognitive learning. It takes place under circumstances that are highly charged emotionally. Indeed, there is good reason to believe that without such emotional attachment to the significant others the learning process would be difficult if not impossible. The child identifies with the significant others in a variety of emotional ways. Whatever they may be, internalization occurs only as identification occurs.

The child takes on the significant others’ roles and attitudes, that is, internalizes them and makes them his own. And by this identification with significant others the child becomes capable of identifying himself, of acquiring a subjectively coherent and plausible identity. In other words, the self is a reflected entity, reflecting the attitudes first taken by significant others toward it; the individual becomes what he is addressed as by his significant others. This is not a one-sided, mechanistic process. It entails a dialectic between identification by others and self-identification, between objectively assigned and subjectively appropriated identity. The dialectic, which is present each moment the individual *identifies* with his significant others, is, as it were, the particularization in individual life of the general dialectic of society that has already been discussed.

Although the details of this dialectic are of course, of great importance for social psychology, it would exceed our present purpose if we were to follow up its implications for social-psychological theory. What is most important for our considerations here is the fact that the individual not only takes on the roles and attitudes of others, but in the same process takes on their world. Indeed, identity is objectively defined as location in a certain world and can be subjectively appropriated only *along with* that world. Put differently, all identifications take place within horizons that imply a specific social world. The child learns that he *is* what he is called. Every name implies a nomenclature, which in turn implies a designated social location. To be given an identity involves being assigned a specific place in the world. As this identity is subjectively appropriated by the child (“*I am John Smith*”), so is the world to which this identity points. Subjective appropriation of identity and subjective appropriation of the social world are merely different aspects

“Socialization: The Internalization of Reality,” by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman, reprinted from *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, 1966, Doubleday, pp. 119–137. www.randomhouse.com

2 Socialization: The Internalization of Reality

of the *same* process of internalization, mediated by the *same* significant others.

Primary socialization creates in the child's consciousness a progressive abstraction from the roles and attitudes of specific others to roles and attitudes in *general*. For example, in the internalization of norms there is a progression from "Mummy is angry with me *now*" to "Mummy is angry with me *whenever* I spill the soup." As additional significant others (father, grandmother, older sister, and so on) support the mother's negative attitude toward soup-spilling, the generality of the norm is subjectively extended. The decisive step comes when the child recognizes that *everybody* is against soup-spilling, and the norm is generalized to "One does not spill soup"—"one" being himself as part of a generality that includes, in principle, *all* of society insofar as it is significant to the child. This abstraction from the roles and attitudes of concrete significant others is called the generalized other. Its formation within consciousness means that the individual now identifies not only with concrete others but with a generality of others, that is, with a society. Only by virtue of this generalized identification does his own self-identification attain stability and continuity. He now has not only an identity *vis-à-vis* this or that significant other, but an identity *in general*, which is subjectively apprehended as remaining the same no matter what others, significant or not, are encountered. This newly coherent identity incorporates within itself all the various internalized roles and attitudes—including, among many other things, the self-identification as a non-spiller of soups.

The formation within consciousness of the generalized other marks a decisive phase in socialization. It implies the internalization of society as such and of the objective reality established therein, and, at the same time, the subjective establishment of a coherent and continuous identity. Society, identity *and* reality are subjectively crystallized in the same process of internalization. This crystallization is concurrent with the internalization of language. Indeed, for reasons evident from the foregoing observations on language, language constitutes both the most important content and the most important instrument of socialization.

When the generalized other has been crystallized in consciousness, a symmetrical relationship is established between objective and subjective reality. What is real "outside" corresponds to what is real

"within." Objective reality can readily be "translated" into subjective reality, and vice versa. Language, of course, is the principal vehicle of this ongoing translating process in both directions. It should, however, be stressed that the symmetry between objective and subjective reality cannot be complete. The two realities correspond to each other, but they are not coextensive. There is always more objective reality "available" than is actually internalized in any individual consciousness, simply because the contents of socialization are determined by the social distribution of knowledge. No individual internalizes the totality of what is objectivated as reality in his society, not even if the society and its world are relatively simple ones. On the other hand, there are always elements of subjective reality that have not originated in socialization, such as the awareness of one's own body prior to and apart from any socially carried apprehension of it. Subjective biography is not fully social. The individual apprehends himself as a being both inside *and* outside society. This implies that the symmetry between objective and subjective reality is never a static, once-for-all state of affairs. It must always be produced and reproduced *in actu*. In other words, the relationship between the individual and the objective social world is like an ongoing balancing act....

In primary socialization there is no *problem* of identification. There is no choice of significant others. Society presents the candidate for socialization with a predefined set of significant others, whom he must accept as such with no possibility of opting for another arrangement. *Hic Rhodus, hic salta*. One must make do with the parents that fate has regaled one with. This unfair disadvantage inherent in the situation of being a child has the obvious consequence that, although the child is not simply passive in the process of his socialization, it is the adults who set the rules of the game. The child can play the game with enthusiasm or with sullen resistance. But, alas, there is no other game around. This has an important corollary. Since the child has no choice in the selection of his significant others, his identification with them is quasi-automatic. For the same reason, his internalization of their particular reality is quasi-inevitable. The child does not internalize the world of his significant others as one of many possible worlds. He internalizes it as *the* world, the only existent and only conceivable world, the world *tout court*. It is for this reason that the world internalized in primary socialization is so much more firmly entrenched in consciousness than worlds

internalized in secondary socializations. However much the original sense of inevitability may be weakened in subsequent disenchantments, the recollection of a never-to-be-repeated certainty—the certainty of the first dawn of reality—still adheres to the first world of childhood. Primary socialization thus accomplishes what (in hindsight, of course) may be seen as the most important confidence trick that society plays on the individual—to make appear as necessity what is in fact a bundle of contingencies, and thus to make meaningful the accident of his birth.

Primary socialization ends when the concept of the generalized other (and all that goes with it) has been established in the consciousness of the individual. At this point he is an effective member of society and in subjective possession of a self and a world. But this internalization of society, identity and reality is not a matter of once and for all. Socialization is never total and never finished....

SECONDARY SOCIALIZATION

It is possible to conceive of a society in which no further socialization takes place after primary socialization. Such a society would, of course, be one with a very simple stock of knowledge. All knowledge would be generally relevant, with different individuals varying only in their perspectives on it. This conception is useful in positing a limiting case, but there is no society known to us that does not have *some* division of labor and, concomitantly, *some* social distribution of knowledge; and as soon as this is the case, secondary socialization becomes necessary.

Secondary socialization is the internalization of institutional or institution-based “subworlds.” Its extent and character are therefore determined by the complexity of the division of labor and the concomitant social distribution of knowledge. Of course, generally relevant knowledge, too, may be socially distributed—for example, in the form of class-based “versions”—but what we have in mind here is the social distribution of “special knowledge”—knowledge that arises as a result of the division of labor and whose “carriers” are institutionally defined. Forgetting for a moment its other dimensions, we may say that secondary socialization is the acquisition of role-specific knowledge,

the roles being directly or indirectly rooted in the division of labor. There is some justification for such a narrow definition, but this is by no means the whole story. Secondary socialization requires the acquisition of role-specific vocabularies, which means, for one thing, the internalization of semantic fields structuring routine interpretations and conduct within an institutional area. At the same time “tacit understandings,” evaluations and affective colorations of these semantic fields are also acquired. The “subworlds” internalized in secondary socialization are generally partial realities in contrast to the “base-world” acquired in primary socialization. Yet they, too, are more or less cohesive realities, characterized by normative and affective as well as cognitive components.

Furthermore, they, too, require at least the rudiments of a legitimating apparatus, often accompanied by ritual or material symbols. For example, a differentiation may arise between foot soldiers and cavalry. The latter will have to have special training, which will probably involve more than learning the purely physical skills necessary to handle military horses. The language of the cavalry will become quite different from that of the infantry. A terminology will be built up referring to horses, their qualities and uses, and to situations arising as a result of cavalry life, which will be quite irrelevant to the foot soldier. The cavalry will also use a different language in more than an instrumental sense. An angry infantryman swears by making reference to his aching feet, while the cavalryman may mention his horse’s backside. In other words, a body of images and allegories is built up on the instrumental basis of cavalry language. This role-specific language is internalized *in toto* by the individual as he is trained for mounted combat. He becomes a cavalryman not only by acquiring the requisite skills but by becoming capable of understanding and using this language. He can then communicate with his fellow-horsemen in allusions rich in meaning to them but quite obtuse to men in the infantry. It goes without saying that this process of internalization entails subjective identification with the role and its appropriate norms—“I am a horseman.” “A horseman never lets the enemy see the tail of his mount,” “Never let a woman forget the feel of the spurs,” “A fast rider in war, a fast rider in gambling,” and so forth. As the need arises, this body of meanings will be sustained by legitimations, ranging from simple maxims like the foregoing to elaborate mythological constructions. Finally, there may be a variety of representative ceremonies and physical objects—

4 Socialization: The Internalization of Reality

say, the annual celebration of the feast of the horse-god at which all meals are taken on horseback and newly initiated horsemen receive the horsetail fetishes they will henceforth carry around their necks....

The formal processes of secondary socialization are determined by its fundamental problem: it always presupposes a preceding process of primary socialization; that is, that it must deal with an already formed self and an already internalized world. It cannot construct subjective reality *ex nihilo*. This presents a problem because the already internalized reality has a tendency to persist. Whatever new contents are now to be internalized must somehow be superimposed upon this already present reality. There is, therefore, a problem of consistency between the original and the new internalizations. The problem may be more or less difficult of solution in different cases. Having learned that cleanliness is a virtue in one's own person it is not difficult to transfer the same virtue to one's horse. But having learned that certain obscenities are reprehensible as a pedestrian child, it may need some explanation that they are now *de rigueur* as a member of the cavalry. To establish and maintain consistency secondary socialization presupposes conceptual procedures to integrate different bodies of knowledge....

While primary socialization cannot take place without an emotionally charged identification of the child with his significant others, most secondary socialization can dispense with this kind of identification and proceed effectively with only the amount of mutual identification that enters into any communication between human beings. Put crudely, it is necessary to love one's mother, but not one's teacher. Socialization in later life typically begins to take on an affectivity reminiscent of childhood when it seeks radically to transform the subjective reality of the individual. This posits special problems that we shall analyze a little further on.

In primary socialization the child does not apprehend his significant others as institutional functionaries, but as mediators of reality *tout court*; the child internalizes the world of his parents as *the* world, and not as the world appertaining to a specific institutional context. Some of the crises that occur after primary socialization are indeed caused by the recognition that the world of one's parents is not the only world there is, but has a very specific social location, perhaps even one with a pejorative connotation. For example, the older child comes to recog-

nize that the world represented by his parents, the same world that he had previously taken for granted as inevitable reality, is actually the world of uneducated, lower-class, rural Southerners. In secondary socialization, the institutional context is usually apprehended. Needless to say, this need not involve a sophisticated understanding of all the implications of the institutional context. Yet the Southern child, to stay within the same example, does apprehend his school teacher as an institutional functionary in a way he never did his parents, and he understands the teachers role as representing institutionally specific meanings—such as those of the nation as against the region, of the national middle-class world as against the lower-class ambiance of his home, of the city as against the countryside. Hence the social interaction between teachers and learners can be formalized. The teachers need not be significant others in any sense of the word. They are institutional functionaries with the formal assignment of transmitting specific knowledge. The roles of secondary socialization carry a high degree of anonymity; that is, they are readily detached from their individual performers. The same knowledge taught by one teacher could also be taught by another. Any functionary of this type could teach this type of knowledge. The individual functionaries may, of course, be subjectively differentiated in various ways (as more or less congenial, better or worse teachers of arithmetic, and so on), but they are in principle interchangeable.

This formality and anonymity are, of course, linked with the affective character of social relations in secondary socialization. Their most important consequence, however, is to bestow on the contents of what is learned in secondary socialization much less subjective inevitability than the contents of primary socialization possess. Therefore, the reality accent of knowledge internalized in secondary socialization is more easily bracketed (that is, the subjective sense that these internalizations are real is more fugitive). It takes severe biographical shocks to disintegrate the massive reality internalized in early childhood; much less to destroy the realities internalized later. Beyond this, it is relatively easy to set aside the reality of the secondary internalizations. The child lives willy-nilly in the world as defined by his parents, but he can cheerfully leave the world of arithmetic behind him as soon as he leaves the classroom.

The facts that the processes of secondary socialization do not presuppose a high degree of

identification and its contents do not possess the quality of inevitability can be pragmatically useful because they permit learning sequences that are rational and emotionally controlled. But because the contents of this type of internalization have a brittle and unreliable subjective reality compared to the internalizations of primary socialization, in some cases special techniques must be developed to produce whatever identification and inevitability are deemed necessary. The need for such techniques may be intrinsic in terms of learning and applying the contents of internalization, or it may be posited for the sake of the vested interests of the personnel administering the socialization process in question. For example, an individual who wants to become an accomplished musician must immerse himself in his subject to a degree quite unnecessary for an individual learning to be an engineer. Engineering education can take place effectively through formal, highly rational, emotionally neutral processes. Musical education, on the other hand, typically involves much higher identification with a maestro and a much more profound immersion in musical reality. This difference comes from the intrinsic differences between engineering and musical knowledge, and between the ways of life in which these two bodies of knowledge are practically applied. A professional revolutionary, too, needs an immeasurably higher degree of identification and inevitability than an engineer. But here the necessity comes not from intrinsic properties of the knowledge itself, which may be quite simple and sparse in content, but from the personal commitment required of a revolutionary in terms of the vested interests of the revolutionary movement. Sometimes the necessity for the intensifying techniques may come from both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. The socialization of religious personnel is one example.

The techniques applied in such cases are designed to intensify the affective charge of the socialization process. Typically, they involve the institutionalization of an elaborate initiation process, a novitiate, in the course of which the individual comes to commit himself fully to the reality that is being internalized. When the process requires an actual transformation of the individual's "home" reality it comes to replicate as closely as possible the character of primary socialization, as we shall see a little later. But even short of such transformation, secondary socialization becomes effectively charged to the degree to which immersion in and commitment to the new reality are institutionally defined as necessary. The relationship of the indi-

vidual to the socializing personnel becomes correspondingly charged with "significance," that is, the socializing personnel take on the character of significant others *vis-à-vis* the individual being socialized. The individual then commits himself in a comprehensive way to the new reality. He "gives himself" to music, to the revolution, to the faith, not just partially but with what is subjectively the whole of his life. The readiness to sacrifice oneself is, of course, the final consequence of this type of socialization.

An important circumstance that may posit a need for such intensification is competition between the reality-defining personnel of various institutions. In the case of revolutionary training the intrinsic problem is the socialization of the individual in a counter-definition of reality—counter, that is, to the definitions of the "official" legitimators of the society. But there will also have to be intensification in the socialization of the musician in a society that offers sharp competition to the aesthetic values of the musical community. For example, it may be assumed that a musician in the making in contemporary America must commit himself to music with an emotional intensity that was unnecessary in nineteenth-century Vienna, precisely because in the American situation there is powerful competition from what will subjectively appear as the "materialistic" and "mass culture" world of the "rat race." Similarly, religious training in a pluralistic situation posits the need for "artificial" techniques of reality-accentuation that are unnecessary in a situation dominated by a religious monopoly. It is still "natural" to become a Catholic priest in Rome in a way that it is not in America. Consequently, American theological seminaries must cope with the problem of "reality-slipping" and devise techniques for "making stick" the same reality. Not surprisingly, they have hit upon the obvious expedient of sending their most promising students to Rome for a while.

Similar variations may exist within the same institutional context, depending upon the tasks assigned to different categories of personnel. Thus the degree of commitment to the military required of career officers is quite different from that required of draftees, a fact clearly reflected in the respective training processes. Similarly different commitments to the institutional reality are demanded from an executive and from lower-echelon white-collar personnel, from a psychoanalyst and from a psychiatric social worker, and so forth. An executive must be "politically sound" in a way

6 *Socialization: The Internalization of Reality*

not incumbent on the supervisor of the typing pool, and a “didactic analysis” is imposed upon the psychoanalyst but only suggested to the social worker, and so on. There are, then, highly differentiated systems of secondary socialization in complex institutions, sometimes geared very sensitively to the differential requirements of the various categories of institutional personnel.

The institutionalized distribution of tasks between primary and secondary socialization varies with the complexity of the social distribution of knowledge. As long as it is relatively uncomplicated, the same institutional agency can proceed from primary to secondary socialization and carry on the latter to a considerable extent. In cases of very high complexity, specialized agencies for secondary

socialization may have to be developed, with full-time personnel specially trained for the educational tasks in question. Short of this degree of specialization, there may be a sequence of socializing agencies combining this task with others. In the latter case, for example, it may be established that at a certain age a boy is transferred from his mother's hut to the warriors' barracks, where he will be trained to become a horseman. This need not entail full-time educational personnel. The older horsemen may teach the younger ones. The development of modern education is, of course, the best illustration of secondary socialization taking place under the auspices of specialized agencies. The resultant decline in the position of the family with regard to secondary socialization is too well known to require further elaboration here....