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# UNIT 12 SOCIALISATION\*

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## 12.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this Unit, you should be able to:

- Define socialisation;
- Identify some of the main thinkers contributing to studies on socialisation;
- Distinguish the various types of socialisation; and
- Identify agents of socialisation and how they affect your personality.

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## 12.1 INTRODUCTION

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We will begin this unit by focusing on the meaning and definition of socialisation. The discussion will be carried forward by looking at the types and theories of socialisation. Finally we will end the discussion by examining the various agents of socialisation. This unit, thereby, will provide an in-depth understanding of socialisation.

## 12.2 SOCIALISATION – MEANING AND DEFINITIONS

### 12.2.1 What is Socialisation?

Socialisation is an important process for the functioning and continuation of society. Different societies have different ways and methods to train their new born members so that they are able to develop their own personalities. This training of and building the personality of the child is called socialisation. Socialisation is a process of learning rules, habits and values of a group to which a person belongs whether it is family, friends, colleagues or any other group. It is the process by which a child slowly becomes aware of her/himself as a member of a group and gains knowledge about the culture of the family and also the society into which she/he is born.

Socialisation is also considered as the passing of culture from one generation to the next. During the process of socialisation, children learn about their family traditions from their elders and preserve them and pass them on to the next generation as they grow older. Socialisation helps children to learn and perform the different roles and responsibilities which they have learnt from their elders. It therefore, helps to associate one generation with the others (Giddens, 2006; Jonson, 1960).

### 12.2.2 Some Definitions of Socialisation

- i) **Anthony Giddens:** “Socialisation refers to the process which transforms a quite helpless human infant into a self-aware, knowledgeable person who is skilled in the ways of their society’s culture” (2014:263-64).
- ii) **Peter Worsley:**”By this is meant, simply, the transmission of culture, the process whereby men learn the rules and practices of social groups. Socialisation is an aspect of all activity within all human societies” (1972:153).
- iii) **Tony Bilton:** “The process by which we acquire the culture of the society into which we are born - the process by which we acquire our social characteristics and learn the ways of thought and behaviour considered appropriate in our society - is called socialisation” (1981:10).

## 12.3 TYPES OF SOCIALISATION

Socialisation is a process that continues throughout life from birth till adulthood. However, there are different phases in which the process takes place. These phases are usually spread across different age groups and have been categorised as the different types of socialisation.

### 12.3.1 Primary Socialisation

**Primary socialisation** is the most important feature in the process of socialisation. It happens during infancy and childhood. The primary stage basically takes shape during infancy and childhood where basic knowledge and language or behaviour is taught. This phase of socialisation usually takes place

within the family. During this phase infants learn language and certain basic behaviour forms of the family and the society in which she/he lives. It is through primary socialisation that the foundations for later learning are laid. As Frønes argues, “Primary socialisation refers to the internalization of the fundamental culture and ideas of a society; it shapes the norms, values and beliefs of the child at a time when it has little understanding of the world and its different phenomena, and the basic socialisation agent moulding the child is the family” (Frønes, 2016: 13).

### 12.3.2 Secondary Socialisation

**Secondary Socialisation** occurs once the infant passes into the childhood phase and continues into maturity. During this phase more than the family some other agents of socialisation like the **school** and **friends’** group begin to play a role in socialising the child. Different kinds of social interaction through these different agents of socialisation help the child to learn the moral standards, customs and principles of their society and culture. When the child receives training in institutional or formal settings such as the school, secondary socialisation takes shape. This level runs parallel to primary socialisation. But, unlike the family settings, children in schools are trained to conform to authority.

Frønes argues that, secondary socialisation is usually carried out by institutions and people in specific roles and positions. Further, it involves the “acquisition of knowledge and conscious learning, and thus opens for critical reflection, while primary socialisation points to the transmission of naturalised cultural patterns” (Frønes, 2016: 14).

### 12.3.3 Gender Socialisation

**Gender socialisation** can be understood as the process by which different agents of socialisation shape the thoughts of children and make them learn different gender roles. According to the World Health Organisation, **Gender** “refers to the socially constructed characteristics of women and men – such as norms, roles and relationships of and between groups of women and men.” **Gender role** refers to “social roles assigned to each sex and labelled as masculine or feminine” (Giddens, 2014: 82).

Much before children begin to know themselves as a male or a female they receive a series of clues from adults in their family and society because male and female adults have different ways of managing infants. Infants learn quite a lot from visual and symbolic indicators. Differences in the manner of dressing, hairstyle, different cosmetic products used by men and women, provide children with indicators of variation between the male and female. Within two years of age children begin to vaguely understand what gender is. Apart from adults around them children receive a lot of clues about gender roles and differences from television programmes, toys they play with as well from their colouring and picture books. **For example**, a baby girl is very commonly seen playing with dolls and/or a kitchen set while a boy would be found playing with toy cars and/or toy guns.

However, today the definition of gender is no longer fixed within the binary of male and female because there is a third category which is often referred to as the **third gender**. The term third gender is assigned to a person by the society or

by the person her/himself when one does not want to be recognised as a male or a female. In some societies where three or more genders are recognised, we can find the use of the term third gender. This is usually associated with the gender role that a person performs and in some societies the gender roles are not very strictly defined. The term third gender is often used to describe *hijras* in the context of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. More recently the term third gender is also associated with the term **Queer** wherein any person not willing to be strictly identified as male or female may be categorised as a Queer person (Towle and Morgan, 2002).

### 12.3.4 Anticipatory Socialisation

The term **anticipatory socialisation** was introduced by the sociologist Robert K. Merton (1957). It is a process by which someone is consciously socialised for future occupations, positions and social relationships. Through anticipatory socialisation people are socialised into groups to which they wish to or have to join so that entry into the group does not seem to be very difficult. Some people suggest that parents are the primary source of anticipatory socialisation when it comes to socialising their children for future careers or social roles. **For example**, a child made to leave home to stay in a boarding school with the anticipation of better socialisation.

### 12.3.5 Re-socialisation

**Re-socialisation** refers to the process of leaving certain behaviour patterns and roles in order to adopt new ones as part of one's evolution in life. Resocialisation occurs when there is a major transformation in the social role of a person. It occurs throughout life where individuals experience radical breakthroughs from their past experiences and learn new manners and values which are starkly different from what they had learnt previously. Sociologist **Erving Goffman** analyzed resocialization in mental asylum. According to him a mental asylum is a total institution in which almost every aspect of the resident's life was controlled by the institution in order to serve the goals of the institution. **For example**, the institution demands that every inmate obeys the rules and regulations even if it is not very useful for the person (Ferguson, 2002; Kennedy et al, 1973). Another common example is that of a girl who is about to get married is often re-socialised by suggestions and advice from her parents on different matters so that after marriage it is easier for her to adjust in her husband's home with her in-laws.

### 12.3.6 Adult Socialisation

**Adult socialisation** takes place in adulthood when individuals adapt to new roles such as that of a husband, a wife or an employee. This is related to their needs and wants. People continue to learn values and behaviour patterns throughout life. Socialisation does not have any fixed time period. It begins at birth and continues till old age. In traditional societies the older people had a significant influence in important matters related to the family. Both male and female adults had exerted their influence with increase in age (Mortimer and Simmons, 1978).

In modern times we can find this elderly influence decreasing in some families. However, that is not to say that older people have completely lost their authority in the modern day families. Even today their opinions are sought for certain

important matters. Like the younger generation continues to be socialised by their adults similarly the older generation also gets socialised by their younger generation through different experiences. Apart from the family adult — socialisation continues to take place through other agents of socialisation. **For example**, one’s workplace, social groups, senior citizens’ forums, clubs for recreation and some religious institutions also.

**Check Your Progress 1**

1) What are some of the important characteristics of Socialisation?

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2) Give one prominent definition of socialisation?

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3) Write a small note on the types of socialisation by explaining how the different types are spread across different age groups throughout life.

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**12.4 THEORIES OF SOCIALISATION**

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Some of the most well-known theories in sociology and psychology agree that the ‘self’ is the primary concept in the development of the child and it is through the process of socialisation that such a development takes place. Therefore, let us look at some prominent theories of socialisation in order to understand the concept well.

**12.4.1 Mead and his Theory of the Development of Self**

According to the American sociologist **George Herbert Mead** (1972), young children begin to develop as social beings by imitating the actions of those near

them. By doing so the child is able to develop the ability to understand the action of the person with whom he is interacting. ‘**Play**’ is one of the ways by which children often imitate what adults do. The play stage begins around the third year during which the child begins to adopt different roles of adults in her/his life. Mead refers to these others as “**significant others**”. Children’s play gradually develops from simple imitation to difficult games where a child of four or five years old will enact the role of an adult. **For example**, children are often found imitating the classroom situation where one becomes the teacher, the others become students and they enact a classroom teaching session. Most children locally refer to this play as ‘Teacher-Teacher’. Another similar act of play is that of ‘Doctor-Patient’ where children imitate the role of a doctor, nurse and patient and try to enact a situation where a patient goes to the doctor for treatment.

Mead refers to this act of imitation as “**taking the role of the other**”. This stage being a complex one is known as the **game stage** where children begin to attain maturity and develop a sense of self and others. Children begin to understand themselves as “**me**” by looking at themselves through other people’s views and opinions about them. The “**me**” is the social self while the “**I**” is the response to the “**me**”. In simple words, “**I**” comprises of the response of the child to the action of others while “**me**” is the organised set of reactions of others that the child takes on.

Another stage of self-development occurs around the age of eight or nine. At this stage children are able to function as members of a group and also understand their role as a member of that group. Mead introduces the concepts of “**generalised other**” and “**significant other**”. “**Generalised other**” can be understood as those rules and values of the culture of a particular group in which the child is engaged. By understanding the “**generalised other**” the child is able to understand what kind of manners is expected as well as valued in any social setting. “**Significant other**” consists of those persons who are of importance in the child’s life and affect her/his understanding of self along with the child’s emotions and behaviours. Mead was one of the first thinkers to understand the role of “**significant other**” in the development of self. According to him socialisation depends upon the child’s understanding of others’ views as important in her/his life.

### 12.4.2 Cooley and his Concept of the Looking Glass Self

**Charles Horton Cooley** (1922a) the American sociologist is best known for his concept of the “**looking glass self**”. Children develop a concept of their selves with the help of others around them. She/he forms an idea about oneself based on the opinions of others about her/him. The kind of social self that develops out of an imagination of how one appears to the other person and the kind of feeling about one’s self can be referred to as “**looking glass self**” or “**reflected self**”. The knowledge about ourselves develops in us through the opinions and reactions of others around this. The social “**looking glass self**” consists of these other people through whom we build an image of ourselves. This knowledge about one’s self is first obtained from the parents and later it is reformed by the judgements of others.

The way in which the mirror helps us to form an opinion about ourselves through the clothing we put on, our face and figure/physique, in a similar manner we try

to imagine how in another person's mind we might appear through our behaviours, manners, and so on. As a result, in our imagination we form an opinion about ourselves through the other person's perceptions and may get positively or negatively affected by it. **For example**, a child who is in the mood to create some mischief might want to lie to her/his parents. However, before creating the mischief the child might reflect over and think that if his/lie is caught that will have a bad impression on her/his parents about her/him.

According to Cooley, there are three main features that make up the idea of the self. The first consists of our imagination of how we appear to the other person. The second feature consists of our imagination of the judgement that the other person makes by our appearances. The third feature consists of some feeling of self-importance, shame or self-doubt based on the imagination of the other person's judgements about our appearances.

### 12.4.3 Freud and his Psychoanalytic Theory

The Austrian neurologist and father of psychoanalysis **Sigmund Freud** (1923a in Strachey, 1961) believes socialisation demands that individuals must do away with their selfish wants for the benefit of the larger society. According to him socialisation is a process that directs one's cravings and instincts in ways that are culturally accepted by the society. He has explained the process of socialisation through three distinguishable parts of the personality: "**id**", "**ego**" and "**superego**".

The "**id**" consists of all kinds of basic impulses. It is the unconscious, selfish, impulsive and illogical part of the personality that always tries to increase the feeling of pleasure by avoiding pain. The "**id**" tries to make a person work towards achieving the selfish desires by not paying any heed to other individuals or social rules and standards. **For example**, a child craving for a second helping of dessert screamed constantly until she was given another serving.

The "**ego**" is the referee between the "**id**" and the "**superego**". It tries to maintain a balance between the "**id**" (basic impulses) and the "**superego**" (norms of the society). The "**ego**" tries to regulate our desires and cravings and helps us to obey the norms of society. As a referee the "**ego**" tries to control our impulses according to the norms of the society. **For example**, we often get tempted by discount offers in the shopping malls and feel like purchasing as much as we can. However, we restrict ourselves to buying just a few products because we realize that buying everything at once might not be a practical thing to do. This process of adjustment among the "**id**", "**ego**" and "**superego**" continues throughout life. This adjustment is the principle means of socialisation.

The "**superego**" refers to the principles, rules and ethics that one learns through the process of socialisation. The "**superego**" comprises of the norms of a society which are internalised through socialisation. The "**superego**" is the inner voice ('conscience') of the individual and in that inner voice the hopes, beliefs and guidelines of the society are organised. **For example**, Ruchi was eager to steal some grocery from the store without anyone noticing her. But, because she knew that stealing is not the right thing to do so she did not steal even though she would have never got caught. The "**id**" and the "**superego**" are always opposed to each other because neither is it always possible to fulfil all our wishes and demands nor is it easy to keep ourselves completely away from our cravings.

**Check Your Progress 2**

1) According to Mead, how does the social self of a child develop?

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2) According to Cooley what is the meaning of ‘looking glass self’?

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3) What are the different parts of the personality and how are they associated with socialisation according to Freud?

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**12.5 AGENTS OF SOCIALISATION**

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The process of socialisation is not just limited to the family. It consists of a range of groups and institutions through which people learn the culture of their society. As already mentioned the family is the primary agent of socialisation while some of the important secondary agents of socialisation include the peer group, school and the mass media.

Frønes argues that, “*Primary socialisation* was implicitly understood as taking place in the family and during the first part of childhood. In this perspective the socialising agents in the primary process are the parents, especially the mother. *Secondary socialisation* came later and was related to agents as significant others, educational institutions and the media” (Frønes, 2016: 4).

**12.5.1 Family**

Parents along with the family are the most important agents of socialisation. Within the family it is the mother who first begins to socialise the child. Socialisation in basic values such as love and affection, manners and etiquettes are first taught in the family. In a joint family structure apart from the parents, uncles, aunts, grandparents also play important roles to socialise the children.



Children learn their language and develop their speaking abilities in the family. Regional and class differences of the family into which one is born affects the socialisation patterns in different ways as a result of which children from different cultural backgrounds grow up with different values, attitudes and beliefs. The situation within the family whether affectionate or disturbed will affect the growth of a child accordingly.

For example, Patterson et.al (2015) argue that, greater numbers of separations from primary caregivers or greater numbers of residential moves are more likely to have problems in adjustment. These aspects can lead to stress for children and adolescents. Also that, these moves may often be associated with family disruptions – such as separation or divorce of parents, so they may be markers for other stresses. In all, children and adolescents whose families provide stable, supportive environments seem to be at an advantage over those in more chaotic home situations (Patterson et.al.2015: 205). They further attest that, factors such as ‘physical resources’, ‘high-quality parenting’, ‘favourable family climate’, ‘reasonable stability’, and ‘supportive extra familial social networks’ are important resources for socialisation(Patterson et.al. 2015: 206).

### 12.5.2 Peer Groups

Peer groups usually consist of friends who are of the same age. They share a mutual sense of understanding and cooperation with each other and also consider each of them as equals. Initially peer groups are formed in the neighbourhood or the housing community where the children live. When children are young they usually begin by making friends with children of similar gender. As a result peer groups exert a significant influence on gender socialisation. Once children enter the school their peer groups become diverse. Children who become part of peer groups are usually seen spending more time with their friends than with family members. The influence of peers group continues throughout life from the neighbourhood to education institutions to workplace and so on.

Bukowski et. al. (2015) argue that, “even after face-to-face interactions have come to an end, peers can maintain their contact with each other through 20th- and 21st-century forms of media. Starting during the preschool years, when many children spend their days in day care centers, experiences with peers can make up a large part of a child’s daily life. These experiences can be sources of companionship, stimulation, information, help, rewards, security, joy, and, at times, frustration and harm” (Bukowskiet.al., 2015: 228).

For example, one of the many negative forms of peer socialisation can be the aspect of peer pressure: deviant acts such as any kind of addiction (smoking and drinking) can be attributed as elements of peer pressure.

### 12.5.3 School

The school is known to be the first formal agent of socialisation which shapes the ideas and attitudes of a child. Children learn to maintain certain decorum in the class, they learn to obey rules of discipline in the school and be diligent in learning the lessons that are taught in class. The children are expected to listen to their teachers and accept their authority. At times teachers’ reactions also have positive or negative implications on the children. The school is not only responsible for formally training the child in reading, writing and arithmetic but

it also helps to develop critical thinking abilities. Broadly speaking, the school helps in the overall development of the child and in the diffusion of culture of the society. The role of the teacher becomes very important within such a setting.

Frønes argues that, for many children the teacher becomes a secondary socializing agent. However, for many others, the teacher can have primary functions. Hence, the borders between primary and secondary socialisation get blurred in such cases. He further says that, “although schools and the dissemination of their curricula in general is understood as part of secondary socialisation, in the knowledge-based economies the fundamental numerical and alphabetical skills provided by the schools could also be defined as belonging to primary socialisation”. In this way, it is suggested that the ‘hidden curriculum’ of cultural codes suggests that the major educational institutions influence young people through more than just the mediation of the formal curriculum (Frønes, 2016:4).

Overall, the role of the school can be attributed as equally important with respect to the family when it comes to socialisation of the children. A recently popular film, *Hindi Medium* vividly demonstrates this aspect wherein in contemporary societies; parents tend to over-rely on the school setting for socialisation.

#### 12.5.4 Mass Media

Mass media includes various agents of communication for instance, the radio, television, newspapers, magazines, media portals and websites and the like. Prot et.al. (2015) argue that in this age of electronic media, children are provided with a variety of new learning opportunities which broaden the range of events children experience. As a consequence, it is witnessed that socialisation is no longer primarily or secondarily dependent to the influences of family, peers or other such agencies (Prot et.al, 2015: 276). Frønes further contends that our contemporary social realities and myths are given a visual as well as a narrative form through the media, and in this respect the modern social media illustrate how the medium shapes the message. He gives the example of Facebook’s architecture which “encourages various presentations of taste, identity and popularity assessment, structuring both the form and content of the communication” (Frønes, 2016: 21).

Over the years television has become the greatest source of influence especially for children, when compared to the other tools of communication. There are different kinds of programmes that are available on the television ranging from serials, movies, cartoons to news, music, fashion, food, history and geography that cater to people belonging to different age groups. However, Prot et. al. (2015: 280) reiterate that, violent media exposure is a causal risk factor for aggression. Television programmes for children especially cartoons, portray high levels of violent acts and episodes of different types. Although children might remain passive to such depiction of violence yet these can affect them in the form of nightmares and/or feelings of uncertainty and fear. Apart from this, certain forms of music, films or even violent video games may have such attributes. For example, Prot et.al attest that, racing video games such as *Need for Speed*, *Burnout*, and *Road Rash*, which can be rewarding for players, can be causes for reckless or violent driving. However, they also suggest that playing prosocial characters in nonviolent video games such as *Super Mario Sunshine* can lead to significant decrease in hurtful behaviour and increase in helpful behaviours (Prot

et.al, 2015: 286). Hence, the media plays a very important role in the process of socialisation by moulding our understanding of the world around us.

**Check Your Progress 3**

- 1) Discuss the role of family and the school as agents of primary and secondary socialisation respectively.

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- 2) Give two examples of peer group socialisation.

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- 3) Explain how media can have negative impacts on socialisation.

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**12.6 LET US SUM UP**

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In this unit we have studied the various dimensions of socialisation. We began by understanding the meaning and nature of socialisation which included some definitions. We learnt about various types of socialisation and then we moved on to study some of the most important theories of socialisation. In this unit we have also seen that there are many agents of socialisation and how each one of them plays an important role in the process of socialisation.

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