The views of Locke, Cooley, and Mead are theoretical explanations of the socialization process. We still need to consider some specific forces and situations that shape socialization experiences. In sociological terms, the specific individuals, groups, and institutions that provide the situations in which socialization can occur are called agents of socialization. In the United States, the primary agents of socialization include the family, peer groups, the school, and the mass media.

The Family

The family is the most important agent of socialization in almost every society. The importance of the family rests primarily in its role as the principal socializer of young children. It is within the family that most children first learn how to behave in socially acceptable ways, to develop close emotional ties, and to internalize the values and norms of society.

Experiences within the family help determine the type of person an individual becomes. The cases of Anna, Isabelle, and Genie discussed in the first section of this chapter provide extreme examples of the negative consequences sometimes brought by harsh family environments. But even in stable families, variations in family composition, beliefs, behaviors, and circumstances produce a society of individuals who share in the patterns of the larger culture but who retain unique personalities and behavioral traits.

Socialization in a family setting can be both deliberate and unconscious. A father may teach his children about the importance of telling the truth or being considerate to others. A mother may instruct her children in how to spend and save money. These are deliberate, or intended, socialization activities.

There also are unconscious, or unintended, socialization activities. Many times these activities have an even greater effect on children than do deliberate attempts at socialization. Suppose, for example, a father carefully explains to his child about the importance of being polite. Then a situation occurs in which the father is impolite himself. Is the child likely to follow what the father says or what he actually does? Unintended socialization is very common. For every instance in which parents deliberately try to influence a child in one direction, there are numerous instances in which they send out unintended messages that push the child in another direction.

The Peer Group

The family provides many, if not most, of the socialization experiences of early childhood. Infants and very young children are particularly likely to spend almost all of their time in a family setting. As children grow older, however, they increasingly are influenced by forces outside of the family. In particular, they begin to relate more and more to their peer groups. A peer group is a primary group composed of individuals of roughly equal age and social characteristics.

To have friends and be accepted in society, it is important for us to be accepted by our peers. To win their acceptance, we behave according to their standards. Our personality thus is shaped by our peer group as we try to be the kind of person we think the group wants us to be.

Peer group socialization is somewhat unique. Socialization in the family and in the school tends to be more structured. The emphasis is on acquiring the skills that will enable an individual to fit into the larger society. In the case of peer groups, on the other hand, the focus is on group interests and acquiring the skills needed to fit into a subculture. Socialization also tends to be much more unstructured in a peer group setting.

Because the focus within peer groups is on the subculture, group goals sometimes are at odds with the goals of the larger society. Parents in particular become alarmed if they believe that the norms and values of the group are becoming more important to their children than family norms and values.

The School

For most young people, the school occupies large amounts of time and attention—anywhere from 13 to 20 or more years. Thus the school plays a
As children grow into teenagers, the peer group takes on added importance.

major role in socializing individuals. Much of this socialization process is deliberate. Class activities are planned for the deliberate purpose of teaching reading, writing, arithmetic, and other skills. Extracurricular activities, such as school dances, clubs, and athletic events, are intended to train the student for life in the larger society. Schools also attempt to transmit cultural values, such as patriotism, responsibility, and good citizenship.

A large amount of unintentional socialization also occurs within the school. Teachers may become models for students in such unintended areas as manners of speech or styles of dress. In addition, every school contains many peer groups that influence the habits of their members.

The Mass Media

While the family, the peer group, and the school probably are the most important agents of socialization, there are other agents as well. One of the most influential of these is the mass media. The mass media includes newspapers, magazines, books, television, radio, films, and other forms of communication that reach large audiences with no personal contact between the individuals sending the information and those receiving it.

Of the various forms of mass media, television probably has the most influence on the socialization of children. There is at least one television set in 98 percent of the homes in the United States. More importantly, research shows that television sets are turned on in American homes for an average of seven hours a day.

The effects of television on children is a topic of ongoing debate. On the negative side, research has indicated that most children spend more time watching television than they spend in school. By age 18, these children will have witnessed countless fictional acts of murder, rape, robbery, and other forms of crime and violence. This is alarming in view of the fact that many studies have found a relationship between violence on television and aggression among viewers, particularly children.

Another long-standing criticism of television is that it presents an image of society that reflects white middle-class values. The life experiences of many racial, religious, and economic groups often are either ignored or portrayed in a negative light.

On the positive side, television expands our world. It can be a powerful educational tool. For example, television brings far-off places into our homes, makes world events immediate, and introduces us to subjects we might never experience on our own.

Other Agents

Religion is another important agent of socialization, particularly in the area of values transmission. Fully 65 percent of the population of the
The Function of Fairy Tales

Parents and teachers have many tools at their disposal to assist in the socialization of young children. One of the most effective tools is literature. Of the various forms of literature written for children, the fairy tale has enjoyed the longest run of popularity. What is it about fairy tales that makes them such an enduring agent of socialization? Child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim has explored this question in his book *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*.

According to Bettelheim, the value and appeal of fairy tales rests in the fact that they help children master the problems of growing up. Fairy tales do this by stimulating children's imagination and by allowing them to deal subconsciously with their fears. In modern society, we stress the optimistic side of life. Humans are portrayed as being basically good. A successful life is seen as one that is easy and free from worry. These views of the world can be confusing for children. Children know that they are not always good and that life is not always easy. The message of fairy tales is that evil and virtue, good and bad exist in everything. Fairy tales also teach children that difficulties in life are unavoidable and must be met head on. Children see the fairy tale hero face the images of good and evil and find a way for good to triumph through cleverness or bravery.

The socialization lessons contained in fairy tales are indirect, however. According to Bettelheim, children do not identify with the "good" or "bad" act. Rather, they identify with the hero, who happens to be good. The hero serves as a role model for the young child. Children do not ask "Do I want to be good?" Instead they ask "Who do I want to be like?" This distinction is important because it enables children to accept socially sanctioned behavior before they are old enough to grasp the moral issues involved.

The structure of the fairy tale is ideally suited to the way young children think. Children cannot understand the complexities of the adult world. They see things in black and white rather than in shades of gray. Situations and people are right or wrong, good or bad. Fairy tales mimic this simplified view of the world. Fundamental issues are presented in an either/or format that children can easily grasp. The witch is bad and ugly, the princess is kind and beautiful, and the prince is strong and brave. Good always triumphs over evil.

More important than the structure of fairy tales is the subject matter. Love, fear, death, isolation, and abandonment are prominent themes. Rather than being frightening, these themes allow young children to deal with fears that they might not be able to express in words.

Fairy tales have the added advantage of taking on new meanings as a child grows. In the case of *Cinderella*, for example, very young children can understand the message of good Cinderella winning out over her bad stepsisters. Older children also might grasp the notion of sibling rivalry contained in the story. Similarly, young children can see in *Rapunzel* the story of a young girl escaping her evil, jealous mother. Older children also might recognize the conflict that is common between adolescents and parents as teenagers attempt to gain independence from their parents.

In short, the important function of fairy tales rests not in telling a literal story or providing simple moral truths. Instead, it rests in allowing children to grasp the contradictions that exist in human nature and social life. Fairy tales do this in a way that is particularly suited to the developmental skills of growing children. By capturing children's imaginations and allowing them to explore their unspoken fears, fairy tales help to mold social behavior.
United States claims membership in an organized church or synagogue. Other agents of socialization include organizations such as the Little League, Camp Fire Boys and Girls, and 4-H clubs. In addition, for those who are employed, jobs add another assist in the socialization process.

One rather unique agent of socialization is the total institution. A total institution is a setting in which people are isolated from the rest of society for a set period of time and are subject to the control of officials of varied ranks. Prisons, military boot camp, monasteries, and psychiatric hospitals are examples of total institutions.

Socialization in a total institution differs from the process found in many other settings. Total institutions primarily are concerned with resocializing their members. Resocialization involves a break with past experiences and the learning of new values and norms. In the case of most total institutions, resocialization is directed toward forcibly changing an individual's personality and social behavior. This is accomplished by means such as altering the individual's style of dress, hairstyle, speech, and freedom of movement. Once the individual's sense of self has been shaken, it is easier for those in power to convince the individual to conform to new patterns of behavior.

SECTION 3 REVIEW

DEFINE agents of socialization, resocialization

1. Summarizing Ideas List and describe the main agents of socialization in American society.

2. Contrasting Ideas In what ways are total institutions different from other agents of socialization?

CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY

Personality is the set of behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, and values that are characteristic of an individual. Until relatively recently, the origin of personality was a hotly debated topic. The debate was presented in terms of nature versus nurture. The nature supporters claimed that human behavior is instinctual in origin. The nurture supporters, on the other hand, attributed personality development to the environment and social learning. Only sociobiologists still place strong emphasis on the genetic basis of personality and human behavior. Today, most social scientists view personality as the result of a combination of factors such as birth order, parental characteristics, the cultural environment, and heredity. The harmful effects that isolation produces in children illustrates how important environmental factors are in social and psychological development.

The interactive process through which individuals learn the basic skills, values, beliefs, and behavior patterns of society is called socialization. Several theories have been proposed to explain how individuals develop into functioning members of society. Three such theories are those of John Locke, Charles Horton Cooley, and George Herbert Mead. Locke viewed the newborn infant as a tabula rasa—a blank slate—on which social experiences could write any history. Cooley labeled the interactive process by which we develop an identity the looking-glass self. At the basis of the looking-glass self is the idea that we develop a self-image based on how we imagine we appear to others. Mead added the notion of role-taking—taking or pretending to take the role of the other—to the theories of socialization.

The individuals, groups, and institutions that provide the situations in which socialization can occur are called agents of socialization. The primary agents of socialization include the family, peer groups, the school, and the mass media.