

SOCIAL STRUCTURE
AND PERSONALITY
DEVELOPMENT

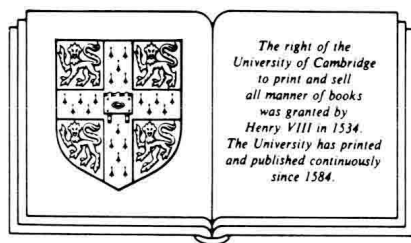
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Social structure and personality development

*The individual as a
productive processor of reality*

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE

NEW YORK NEW ROCHELLE MELBOURNE SYDNEY

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
32 East 57th Street, New York, NY 10022, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1988

First published 1988

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Hurrelman, Klaus.

Social structure and personality development: the individual as
a productive processor of reality/Klaus Hurrelmann.

p. cm.

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-521-35474-9 ISBN 0-521-35747-0 (pbk.)

1. Socialization. 2. Social structure. 3. Personality.

I. Title.

HQ783.H87 1988

303.3'2—dc19

87-37205
CIP

British Library Cataloging-in-Publication applied for

**SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND PERSONALITY
DEVELOPMENT**

PREFACE

THIS textbook is the result of a series of lectures on socialization theory that I have given at the University of Bielefeld over the last 10 years. Socialization theory is an interdisciplinary field in which the major contributions are made by sociological, psychological, and educational research. Its main concern is to investigate in what way and to what extent social, cultural, economic, and ecological structures and processes affect conditions of human personality development. Sociological research traditionally focuses on asking which processes and mechanisms operate within a society to assure that its members accept existing values, norms, and expected behaviors. In psychological research, much attention has been paid to the question of the ways and means by which the individual develops into a competent personality. Educational research concentrates on the question of how the human individual and his or her social and material environment can be stimulated and influenced so as to bring about a personality development that meets both individual and social criteria.

The present book describes the major theoretical approaches in socialization research and summarizes the most important research findings. In this I have attempted to take into account the perspectives of all three disciplines concerned.

More recent theoretical approaches to personality development are based on the assumption that social (environmental) and psychological (personal) factors jointly affect the formation of personality. The interactions between person and social environment are conceived as reciprocal interrelations. Approaches advocating a purely social determination of personality development are regarded as being just as obsolete as those that propose an organic and psychological maturation determined by natural laws. Instead, children, adolescents, and adults are regarded as productively processing and managing external and internal reality and

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actively establishing and shaping relations with the societal and material environment. The concepts of education and development are applied to the entire life span and represent the lifelong process of the individual's interaction with his or her living conditions.

The chapters in this volume provide an overview of the current state of the discussion in socialization research. The first chapter introduces and explains the basic assumptions, terms, and concepts of previous socialization theory. The concepts of human development that underlie the various theories are analyzed, and it is shown how they guide the construction of theoretical concepts, the derivation of central terms, and the choice of methodological procedures. This is followed by a comparison of the sociological and psychological theories that are of major importance for socialization theory: learning theory, psychoanalysis, developmental theory, ecological psychology, systems theory, action theory, and the theory of social structure. Special attention is paid to lines of convergence between the theories that could serve as starting points for future theoretical developments.

The second chapter looks at ideas and hypotheses concerning the theoretical and methodological orientation of present-day socialization research. These ideas start from an interaction theory perspective and relate to a model of the human individual as a productive processor and manager of external and internal reality. Propositions and assumptions are sketched that could serve as a basis for a comprehensive, contextualistic concept of socialization. These ideas are taken up again in the following two chapters, where they are dealt with in more detail.

The third chapter surveys the state of research on how social and material living conditions relate to the development of individual skills and abilities. This discussion starts by investigating the research that was published in the 1960s and 1970s under the heading of "class-specific socialization in the family." After a critical appraisal of the available findings, a theoretical concept concerning the relation between social living conditions and personality development is presented, focusing on the family as the central mediator of societal reality. This is followed by an analysis of the consequences of familial socialization for school and occupational careers, and a discussion of the processes involved in adult socialization.

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PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES OF SOCIALIZATION

THIS chapter describes the major theoretical approaches within socialization research and the basic views of human development that underlie these theories. The discussion concentrates on those chains of theory formation in psychology and sociology that have been particularly influential during the last 20 to 30 years.

AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL APPROACH

Definition of terms

The term "socialization" has been gradually gaining acceptance in scientific discussion since the beginning of the present century. The French sociologist Emile Durkheim was one of the first to introduce the term into science. He related it closely to the term "education," in that he regarded education as the most important societal means of guiding new human generations, who are "asocial" at birth, to a "social life" (Durkheim, 1968, p. 30). Today, Durkheim's use of the term appears to be sociologistic: It is mechanically geared to social adaptation and cultural assimilation and to the imprinting of human personality. More recent use of the term in the social sciences generally disregards such sociologistic components (Wentworth, 1980, p. 40). This has led to a situation in which the term socialization has increasingly caught the interest of the scientific disciplines of psychology and education, where it has found wide acceptance in recent years.

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To avoid any misunderstanding, let me begin by offering my own definitions of socialization, personality development, and education.

Socialization. Socialization in my view, is the process of the emergence, formation, and development of the human personality in dependence on and in interaction with the human organism, on the one hand, and the social and ecological living conditions that exist at a given time within the historical development of a society on the other. Socialization designates the process in the course of which a human being, with his or her specific biological and psychological disposition, becomes a socially competent person, endowed with the abilities and capacities for effective action within the larger society and the various segments of society, and dynamically maintains this status throughout the course of his or her life.

Personality development. The term "personality" is applied as part of the definition of socialization. Personality designates a person's particular organized structure of motives, attributes, traits, attitudes, and action competences that is the biographical product of coping with environmental and organismic demands. Personality development can be described as the sequential long-term changes in essential elements of this structure in the course of time and during the course of life.

Education. The term "education" must be clearly distinguished from the term "socialization." Education is a logical subconcept of the concept of socialization that designates the actions and activities by which persons attempt to influence the personality development of others in order to advance them according to specific values. The term education covers only a part of the socially conveyed influences on personality development that are grouped under the term socialization, namely, the conscious and planned exertions of influence in the sense of social interventions.

This definition of terms provides the primary focus for the argument of this book. The definitions have intentionally been left flexible, so that different theories can be related to them. The definition of socialization given here does not restrict scientific analysis of the area of research to a fixed theoretical and methodological position but leaves enough room for the largest possible number of interpretations.

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Basic theoretical assumptions

Theories that use the concept of socialization accept two basic elementary assumptions that are essential to socialization theory.

The first basic assumption is that *socially conveyed influences on the development of personality actually exist*. The term socialization implicitly suggests the development of personality and the process of social interaction and social change and, through this conceptual link, already asserts that social factors influence human development. The term socialization conveys the idea that no dimensions of the human personality are formed without societal influence but that they are continually realized in a concrete living situation that affects the unfolding of the features of personality.

The second basic assumption is that *a human being can become a subject who is capable of social action only through assimilation into and active dealing with the social and material environment*. Only through this process can the various features and traits of a personality take shape and be modified and reshaped from one phase of life to the next; only in this way will a person be able to come to terms with his or her environment, behave in accordance with the demands of this environment, and, at the same time, have an influence on the formation of that environment.

The way in which these conceptually implicit assumptions about socialization are individually formulated and transformed into specific statements differs according to the theoretical approach taken. It is natural that sociological theories place more emphasis on the social conditions of personality development, whereas psychological theories place much greater emphasis on organismic and mental factors. All effective theories of socialization, however, must allow for the “double nature” of personality development that is both societal and individual and, for this reason, cannot build on one-sided theoretical premises (cf. Goslin, 1969, p. 17; Clausen, 1986b, p. 22).

Recent years have seen a growing similarity and a bridging between the different premises taken by sociology and psychology. The contributions of authors from different disciplines that are brought together in the handbook of socialization research by Hurrelmann and Ulich (1982) and the articles and books by Lerner (1975), Kohli (1980), Elder (1979, 1985), Baltes and Brim (1979), Wentworth (1980), Kerckhoff and Corwin (1981),

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Oerter and Montada (1987), Dollase (1985), and Clausen (1986a) have already indicated common views on many points and in many dimensions.

In this volume I will attempt to integrate a number of different positions and perspectives in the area of personality development, starting from an initial position in the social sciences. As a first step in this venture, it is necessary to investigate the epistemological foundations of theory formation in this field. The design and construction of a theory can be understood only if the more general basic assumptions that underlie the processes of theory formation are also taken into account. In the following discussion, a "theory" is understood as an interrelated and internally conclusive structure of assumptions and statements about an area of research (in this case, personality development).

Epistemological assumptions and theory formation

Epistemological orientations and assumptions are present in all areas of scientific work, and thus also in socialization research. These orientations and assumptions are metatheoretical and metamethodological modelings of the object of investigation. Most theories of personality development and socialization are based on a particular model projection of the individual and/or the society. Proceeding from this model, the theories define the object of investigation and make fundamental statements about its nature. This procedure determines the methods and goals of scientific analysis, because it sets the criteria for the choice of central terms and concepts and their application and interconnection, the criteria for the choice of methodological procedures and their application, and also the criteria for determining the central thematic content for the development of theory and methodology.

The concept of socialization is a scientific construct that describes a portion of reality that is not directly observable for descriptive and analytic purposes. Socialization is an object of investigation that exists in reality but cannot be materially grasped. A model that serves as a focal point for epistemological orientations and assumptions helps to make this complex area of investigation conceptually accessible.

The model chosen is often a metaphor drawn from either the scientific or the everyday world. Thus, for example, metaphors of the person as a physical machine or as a biological organism are found particularly in psychological research. Metaphors of the person as calculating maximizer of utility or player of social roles are found particularly in sociological research into personality development. Any model makes a considerable simplification and selection of aspects of reality, and in this way reduces the complexity of the object of investigation. It presents a more or less arbitrary and plausible arrangement by the scientist, but its claims to validity do not permit further derivation or justification by argument. The one and only thing that counts is the heuristic efficiency of the model in the process of theory formation and methodologically guided research (Wagner, 1984).

In the sociological and psychological theories of personality development, several different models of the person have always existed side by side as a focal point for epistemological orientations and assumptions. Often one of the models, with its respective theoretical and methodological variants, has predominated during a particular historical phase, but other models always remain in the background that may become central in a later historical phase (Looft, 1973; Geulen, 1977). It is probable that such a plurality of epistemological orientations and assumptions, with their respective theoretical and methodological variants, will remain a feature of the theory of personality development.

In the last 10 to 20 years, however, two processes stand out that indicate that some fundamental changes have been occurring in the formation of socialization theory. First of all, in recent years the need to make explicit the epistemological orientations and assumptions that underlie their theory formation and their methodological and empirical strategies appears to have become increasingly self-evident to every group of scientists. This, in turn, has led to better comprehension of the fundamental positions and the principles of construction applied in the theory and methods used by other groups of scientists, and thus makes them reconstructable and criticizable. Greater awareness of epistemological orientations and assumptions makes it possible to assess both theoretical and methodological procedures in the context of the general structure of an epistemological strategy. This makes it easier to identify the relations between concrete individual theories and

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methodological procedures. An increased awareness of the way in which the choice of theory and method depends on the model should, in the long run, increase the willingness of scientific groups to cooperate in those areas of research in which the meta-theoretical and metamethodological starting points are not too divergent or even indicate points of agreement.

Second, in recent years there has been a noticeable closing of the gap between the epistemological orientations and assumptions in psychological and sociological research into personality development. Scientific groups are increasingly moving away from the stereotyped views of human beings that predominated in the past and are turning to more complex and differentiated models as focal points for epistemological assumptions. The extremely simple, metaphorlike views of human beings are gradually being outgrown, especially those that placed a one-sided emphasis on either the organic or social determinants of human development. In their place, more differentiated models are being developed that see the relation between the person and the environment, between individual and society, as the heart of their concern (cf. Featherman and Lerner, 1985; Hurrelmann, 1985; Overtone and Reese, 1973).

If we attempt to seek out the essential model projections at this more differentiated and more complex stage, we arrive at the four models of the relation between person and environment that are briefly presented in the next section. I shall not attempt to describe each model in detail; my object is simply to outline briefly, in a shorthand, idealized form, models of the relation between person and environment that have prevailed within psychology and sociology during the last three decades.

Basic models of the relation between person and environment

The mechanistic model. This model assumes the environment as given and as the cause of a person's behavior. Developmental impulses come from outside the organism. As a result, changes in behavior are interpreted as consequences, as responses to specific environmental conditions. An individual's development is understood as a result of the sum of these responses or also as an adaptation to the norms and values that are defined by the environment. Development is conceived as a permanent change in the

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person's feature and traits. It has no inherent end or goal and is never completed, since the individual adopts the demands and expectations that are fed by the environment into his or her personality structure until the end of life.

The organismic model. In this model, the impulses for human development are assumed to lie within the organism. Development is a process of natural growth that proceeds according to specific, recognizable laws or rules that possess general validity. It is considered to be typical for human development that the individual develops some organizational schemes for the processing of the information and impulses offered by the environment. The process of development follows specific qualitative sequences and sequentially ranked stages that develop out of the preceding stages, and the environment has either a stimulating or a restricting effect on the speed of development. The development is aimed toward a goal or end inherent in the organism, namely the achievement of the qualitatively highest stage of development.

The systemic model. In this model the impulses for human development are assumed to result from the reciprocal adaptation and interpenetration of person and environment as psychological or social systems. In the process of development, a person absorbs, step-by-step, the expectations and behavioral rules of the social system, until they become internalized and self-effective motivational forces and goals for the person's own action. Social and psychological systems interpenetrate one another and, in the course of their development, level off at certain more or less stable states of balance. Thus there is no fixed goal or end of human development, though the reciprocal relation between person and environment strives toward a state of balance. The optimal unfolding of personal needs and actions is possible only in this state.

The contextualistic model. In this model, human development is seen as a lifelong process of interaction between the social and material environment and the human organism. The individual finds him- or herself in a permanent process of acquisition from and confrontation with the social environment. Although the individual's behavior is shaped by his or her successive contexts,

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the individual actively seeks some situations and rejects others, within the limits of social and individual constraints. He or she chooses specific means to attain specific goals, considers the consequences of the corresponding action, and takes into account that these consequences change the contextual conditions for his or her own actions. This model contains no inherent goal or end point for human development. However, the acquisition of social and cultural action competences that help a person to act autonomously in the social environment and to form his or her own identity is seen as the criterion for successful development.

The four epistemological models for the formation of theory and the choice of method in research into socialization processes should not be seen as completely homogeneous in themselves and totally separated from each other. There are several points of contact that offer possibilities for syntheses. Nevertheless, each of the models can serve as a starting point for individual theoretical and methodological concepts. According to the main theoretical traditions of both sociology and psychology, learning theory positions conform most closely to the mechanistic model; psychoanalytic and the cognitive developmental theory positions to the organismic model; ecological and systems theory positions to the systemic model; and action theory and the theory of social structure to the contextualistic model. A closer analysis of some of the most important theories from traditional psychology and sociology, given in the following section, at the same time reveals that even when clear reference is made to one epistemological model, many points of agreement between the different theories can be found.

Which of these models the individual scientist selects as the basis and starting point for the formation of theories and the choice of method finally depends on factors in the scientific process that are hard to evaluate. Such factors, for example, include educational background, level of experience, and also the personal history of the individual scientist. The process of converting the metatheoretical and metamethodological model into theoretical and methodological constructions is also hard to analyze, because it does not follow any generally accepted criteria that are shared by the scientific community but depends instead on conventions that have undergone changes during the course of the development of science – conventions that determine what is acceptable

as a suitable conversion of a model projection into theory and methods. As a rule, in a first step metatheoretical models are replaced by very general theories that contain a series of “empty spaces” which, in turn, have to be filled by specific and direct object-related theories (Eckensberger, 1979).

In the next two sections of this chapter, I will explore some fundamental theoretical approaches to the analysis of the relations between person and environment, in order to evaluate their usefulness for socialization theory. Both psychological and sociological theories will be examined to see how they explain the genesis and development of the human personality as a product of interaction with social and material living conditions. This analysis should produce suggestions for the development of a comprehensive concept of socialization.

PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES: SOCIAL LEARNING
THEORY, PSYCHOANALYSIS, DEVELOPMENTAL
THEORY, AND ECOLOGICAL THEORY

In psychology, it is, above all, concepts from social learning theory, psychoanalysis, cognitive developmental theory, and ecological theory that have proved important for the analysis of human developmental processes in interaction with the social and material environment. Each of these approaches will be dealt with briefly here. Their basic positions will be sketched, and their importance for the analysis and explanation of socialization will be discussed.

Social learning theory

Classical learning theory approaches employ the mechanistic model of the relations between person and environment. The goal is to explain human behavior as a result of the responses to impulses from the environment. Human behavior is not regarded as being influenced either by genetic factors or by the effect of maturation processes. Rather, it is attributed to the processing of experiences with environmental influences. In this respect, learning theory has, from its very beginnings, been opposed to the concept of development as a fixed sequence of qualitative steps of fea-