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## CHAPTER SUMMARY

### 1. *What is sociology?*

Sociology is the study of human societies and human behavior in social settings. Sociologists look beyond individualistic and psychological explanations for behavior to the predictable broad patterns and regular occurrences of social life that influence individual attitudes and behaviors. Sociologists answer "Why?" questions. They are not interested in highly personal reasons for events; instead they employ the sociological imagination to examine personal experiences in the context of the larger social structure. They focus on recurring events and relationships and seek to develop explanations for these patterns of interaction.

Sociologists strive to establish social facts, which are properties of group life that cannot be explained by the actions, feelings, or characteristics of individual persons. They examine such social facts as falling in love, crime rates, and prejudice. Sociologists also uncover the social forces that determine particular social facts.

This emphasis on social facts and social causes distinguishes sociology from other social sciences. Economics examines the production and exchange of goods and services. Psychology studies primarily the individual. Political science studies government, public administration, and the exercise of power.

The ability to adopt the sociological perspective is sometimes labeled "the sociological imagination." C. Wright Mills, who coined the term, stressed the connection between history and biography; that is, individuals can understand their personal experiences more clearly by locating themselves within a particular historical period.

The scientific method employed by sociologists began to emerge in the seventeenth century. Sociologists first gather data carefully. Then they analyze these data within the framework of a theory--a systematic and formal explanation of how two or more phenomena are related to each other. Local theories are very narrow and focus on only one small aspect of social life. At the other extreme, general theories attempt to explain how a considerable number of social factors fit together. Middle-range theories fall between these two types. Scientific inquiry generates knowledge that sometimes differs from common sense, which derives in turn from personal experiences. Common-sense explanations are somewhat limited. Science goes beyond common sense by collecting

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## THE ROLE OF SOCIALIZATION.

### SELF-IDENTITY AND SOCIALIZATION

Each culture has a unique character which shapes the values and behavior of its members. **Socialization** is the process whereby people learn the attitudes, values and actions appropriate to individuals as members of a particular culture. Socialization occurs through human interactions. We will, of course, learn a great deal from those people most important in our lives — immediate family members, best friends, teachers and so forth. But we also learn from people we see on the street, on television and in films and magazines. Through interacting with people as well as through our own observations, we discover how to behave «properly» and what to expect from others if we follow or challenge society's norms and values.

Socialization affects the overall cultural practices of a society and it also shapes the image that we hold of ourselves. In this sense, socialization experiences can have an impact on the shaping of people's personalities. In everyday speech, the term **personality** is used to refer to a person's typical patterns of attitudes, needs, characteristics and behavior.

All researchers would agree that both biological inheritance and the process of socialization play a role in human development. There is no consensus, however, regarding the relative importance of these factors, which can lead to what is called the «nature versus nurture» (or «heredity versus environment») debate. We can more easily contrast the impact of heredity and environment if we examine situations in which one factor operates almost entirely without the other.

Specialists have studied cases where children have been locked away, or severely neglected, or raised in isolation and in these cases the consequences of social isolation have proved to be greatly damaging because the children reacted and behaved like wild animals. Despite their physical and cognitive potential to learn, it was very difficult to adapt them to human relationships and socialization.

Nowadays researchers are increasingly emphasizing the importance of early socialization experiences for humans that grow up in normal environments. It is now recognized that it is not enough to care for an infant's physical needs, parents must also concern themselves with children's social environment. If children are discouraged from having friends, they will be deprived of social interactions with peers that may be critical in their emotional growth.

The isolation studies discussed above may seem to suggest that inheritance can be dismissed as a factor in the social development of humans. However, the interplay between heredity and environment factors is evident in the fascinating studies involving pairs of twins reared apart and brought up separately. Two genetically identical persons developed quite different personalities and political and cultural values because of their differing socialization experiences. Certain characteristics, such as the twins temperaments, voice patterns and nervous habits appear to be strikingly similar. But there are far greater differences between the twins' attitudes, values, types of mates chosen and even drinking habits. These studies have found marked similarities in their tendency toward leadership or dominance, but significant differences in their need for intimacy, comfort and assistance.

Researchers have also been impressed by the following fact: usually twin pairs brought up together have similar scores on intelligence tests. At the same time identical twins brought up in dramatically different social environments score quite differently on intelligence tests.

This finding indicates that, on the one hand, both genetic factors and socialization are influential in human development but, on the other hand, it supports the great impact of socialization on development.

We all have various perceptions, feelings and beliefs about who we are and what we are like. Many sociologists and psychologists have expressed interest in how the individual develops and modifies the sense