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Whatever Happened to Socialization?

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Abstract

Socialization is a key mechanism of social reproduction. Yet, like the functionalists who introduced the concept, socialization has fallen out of favor, critiqued for ignoring power and agency, for its teleology and incoherence, and for a misguided link to "culture of poverty" arguments. In this review, we argue for a renewed, postfunctionalist use of socialization. We review the concept's history, its high point under Parsons, the reasons for its demise, its continued use in some subfields (e.g., gender, race and ethnicity, education), and alternative concepts used to explain social reproduction. We then suggest that something is lost when socialization is avoided or isolated in particular subfields. Without socialization, conceptions of social reproduction face problems of history, power, and transferability. We close by outlining a postfunctionalist agenda for socialization research, providing a framework for a new theory of socialization, one that builds off of cognitive science, pragmatism, the study of language, the reinterrogation of values, and the development of ideology in political socialization.

THE UNTIMELY DEMISE OF SOCIALIZATION

The study of social reproduction is central to sociology, driven by one of its most central puzzles: Why doesn't social life change more often and more dramatically? How sociologists answer this question, whether explicitly or implicitly, forms the contours of broader debates about ongoing inequality, the relationship between structure and agency, and the relative power of institutions and organizational routines. One important way to explain social reproduction has been through a mechanism that sociologists once called socialization.

Yet socialization, as a term, has fallen out of favor. At least within sociology, the word is most famously linked to the mid-century structural functionalism of Talcott Parsons, and both socialization and Parsons lost credibility in the political and epistemological upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s (Stevens 2008). For Parsons (1951, p. 211), socialization is "a particular part of learning" through which actors acquire "the requisite orientations for satisfactory functioning in a role," emphasizing the centrality of stability within his structural-functionalist sociology. While Parsons's thought is actually more complex, functionalist accounts of socialization came to be understood as cultural downloading, lacking necessary attention to agency, incoherence, and conflict.

Scholars since then have applied a variety of similar concepts to explain social continuity, most notably Bourdieu's (1977) dialectical relationship between field and habitus, but also Foucault's (1990) synthesis of power and knowledge, institutionalists' study of organizational logics and institutional rules (Powell & DiMaggio 1991), and the various reconciliations of structure and agency presented by Giddens (1984), Hall (2019), and Sewell (1992) (see also Lizardo & Strand 2010). There were also imports from other fields relevant to particular subdisciplines, such as Said's (1979) study of Orientalism and Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity.

Critics of Parsons's theory of socialization focused on his failure to account for power and agency, as well as his theory's teleology and incoherence. Yet in addition to these analytical criticisms, there were political problems as well. Around the same time Parsons was losing his prominence, the Moynihan report (Moynihan 1965, Wilson 2009) and its arguments about a "culture of poverty" forced a reckoning with how strong theories of socialization could lead to "deficit thinking" (Valencia 2012) and victim blaming in accounts of racial and socioeconomic inequality (Small et al. 2010).

So much for socialization? Maybe not. In this review, we argue that all is not well in a post-socialization sociology and that there is good reason to bring back a postfunctionalist use of the term. We review the history of the concept, its high point under Parsons, the reasons for its demise, its continued use in some subfields (e.g., gender, education, and race and ethnicity), and the terms and concepts other sociologists now use to account for social reproduction. We then suggest that something is lost when we no longer use socialization or when its use remains isolated in particular subfields. Specifically, we emphasize the problems of history, power, and transferability in arguments about social reproduction that avoid using this term. We close by highlighting work that could move socialization in a postfunctionalist direction. We suggest building off sociological work that engages cognitive science, linguistic anthropology, pragmatism, and the reinterrogation of values, and we encourage engagement with recent work in political science, philosophy, and sociology on the renewed importance of ideology and political socialization. We then pull the various criticisms of functionalist socialization together with our agenda for new directions to suggest that Winchester & Guhin's (2019) article on normative frames provides one effective model for how to retheorize socialization.

LIFE OF THE CONCEPT

Parsons and After

According to Google Ngrams, the word socialization and its German and French parallels, *Sozialisierung* and *socialisation*, were used occasionally in the early 1800s but became much more common at the end of that century, paralleling the use of the word sociology itself. The second reference to socialization in the *Oxford English Dictionary* comes from a Georg Simmel (1895) article titled simply "The Problem of Sociology." According to Giddings's (1897) book, *The Theory of Socialization: A Syllabus of Sociological Principles*, Simmel "seems to have been the first writer to use the word 'socialization' in a definition of sociology," helping Giddings (1897, p. 1) to argue that "the Theory of Socialization is the most important part of the Theory of Sociology." Of the field's founders, it was primarily Simmel and Durkheim who used the word socialization in the sense of social reproduction (Weber's and Marx's use of the term referred to something like collectivization).

Half a century later, Parsons made the concept of socialization centrally important to American sociological practice. Linking Durkheim's (1973 [1925]) work on moral education to Piaget's (1965 [1932]) then-new theories of moral development, Parsons (1951; see also Alexander 1978) described how socialization is necessary for both moral and logical capacity. For Parsons (1951, p. 238), socialization is critical for the maintenance of both social continuity and social order, as actors learn both to imitate and to identify with others, eventually learning their specific "role-values and symbol-systems." Such learning, for Parsons (1952), is necessarily interactive (Rawls & Turowetz 2019), meaning that internalization is not quite the same thing as socialization and that socialization might not always be successful, sometimes requiring social control (via other socialized forms of policing the self or others) or causing the experience of alienation (Parsons 1951).

For Parsons, values themselves drive social action and social continuity; many of his critics were more interested in the power that enforces such values, arguing that when structural congruity does exist, it is because of power rather than besides or before it (Cohen et al. 1975, Giddens 1968, Martin & Lembo 2020.) These critiques, however, are criticisms more of Parsons and his lack of attention to power than of socialization as a concept or a process. When Parsons's critics offer implicit or explicit models of social reproduction, they are often not altogether different from the one Parsons described, inasmuch as people come to internalize certain ways of understanding a social world through interactions with significant others within that social world; indeed, they even use the word socialization, although the word is usually not central to any of the arguments' theoretical architectures (e.g., Bourdieu 1984, Foucault 1990, Giddens 1984, Luhmann 1995; for a phenomenological exception, see Berger & Luckmann 1967).

These alternative models of social reproduction also tend to emphasize contestation over coherence. Wrong's (1976, p. 48) arguments about "oversocialization," for example, emphasize how Parsons misread Freud and, in so doing, ignored the role of conflict within an individual's psyche, leading to an overdetermined and circumscribed understanding of agency. In light of these critiques, theorists developed models of social reproduction that explicitly left space for individuals to resist the influence of social forces, both internal and external. For example, Giddens (1984) and, building off of his work, Sewell (1992) emphasize the relationship between agency and structures (as opposed to systems), and with related concerns, Luhmann (1995; see also Vanderstraeten 2000) emphasizes the continual possibility of autopoesis while Archer (1995) focuses on the process of "morphogenesis."

These critiques of Parsonian socialization and its lack of emphasis on individual agency were taken up by other scholars, as well (Emirbayer & Mische 1998). For example, scholars of childhood describe previous theories of socialization as paying too little attention to the fact of childhood agency or the agency of others who are in the early phase of being socialized into a system. Pugh (2014, p. 81) argues that the word socialization "tends to obscure" potential conflicts and heterogeneity "with its undercurrent of implied determinism" (see also Corsaro 1992, 2018; Pugh 2009). Sociologists of organizations have similarly noted that traditional models of professional socialization can put too much emphasis on early training and not pay sufficient attention to the "embedded elaborations" that occur throughout a career (Everitt & Tefft 2019).

Other critiques of Parsons's model emphasized the importance of conflict as constitutive not only of the psyche but also of social life itself. While the conflict tradition need not be redescribed here, one of its most important, long-lasting, and still dominant proponents was Pierre Bourdieu (even if he would not have identified himself as such). Bourdieu described how contestations—as opposed to more abstract and conflict-neutral values—are both the source and outcome of the socializing process. Bourdieu was introduced to American sociologists in this conflict era of the 1970s and early 1980s (e.g., Bourdieu 1977, 1984; Bourdieu & Passeron 1977), and his work was narrated explicitly in contrast to "functionalism" (Collins 1971). Alongside Bourdieu, the late 1970s debuted other key counterarguments to functionalist socialization, especially within the sociology of education (Mehta & Davies 2018): Collins (1979), for example, focused on the arbitrariness and systemic power of credentialism, while Bowles & Gintis (1976) brought a renewed Marxian focus on class reproduction.

The critique of Parsons's insufficient attention to agency is paralleled by a critique of insufficient attention to heterogeneity. In West & Zimmerman's (1987, p. 126) germinal discussion of "doing gender," they describe the many problems with "sex role socialization," one of Parsons's ongoing Freudian concerns, especially the idea that sex roles and gender identities are "achieved" by a young age and then remain "fixed, unvarying, and static." In contrast, they pull on both Goffman (1959) and Garfinkel (1967) to emphasize how gender is an ongoing interactional achievement. While not quite as focused on Goffmanian interaction, Swidler's (2003) immensely influential work on cultural repertoires shows how any one person has a multitude of heterogeneous cultural tools that become useful to solve discrete problems.

Whether focusing on power, agency, or heterogeneity, these critiques come together in criticisms of the effects functionalist theories of socialization can have, especially on scholarly assumptions about the source of inequalities faced by marginalized communities. For example, the culture (or subculture) of poverty thesis suggests that it is the socialization of certain values that explains intergenerational poverty. Highlighting the role of culture (and its socialization) allows intellectuals, politicians, and activists to deny—or at least obfuscate—other mechanisms that have maintained inequality, especially racism and resource hoarding (Golash-Boza 2016, Lewis & Diamond 2015, Seamster 2015, Tilly 1998).

The most lambasted of the culture of poverty arguments are the collected works of Oscar Lewis (1959; though see Harvey & Reed 1996 for an analysis of Lewis as anticapitalist rather than culturalist) and the Moynihan (1965) report, "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action" (see also Gans 2011, Wilson 2009). Socialization is central for Lewis and, especially, Moynihan, who centers the role of the Black family because "the family is the basic social unit of American life; it is the basic socializing unit" (Moynihan 1965, p. 5). Moynihan (1965, p. 48) argues that "the disorganized family has failed in its function as a socializing agency [and so] it has handicapped the children in their relations to the institutions in the community." While Moynihan was not opposed to structural solutions to racial inequality (indeed, this was a goal of his report), his argument has been useful for those who insist—however empirically inaccurately—that poverty is exclusively,

or at least primarily, a problem of culture. And it is socialization, they argue, that makes culture such a problem.

Recent debates about these questions have resisted outright dismissal of cultural arguments (Wilson 2010). Instead, scholars insist that culture is much more complex and heterogeneous than earlier theories might have acknowledged. For example, scholars like Small et al. (2010) call for a reconsideration of the relationship between culture and poverty, implicitly also calling for a theory of socialization that can account for heterogeneity and agency, which many found lacking in the work of Parsons.

MAPPING THE DECLINE OF SOCIALIZATION

To better understand the consequences of antifunctionalist critiques of socialization, we mapped the use of the term across generalist and subfield journals over time. To validate our understanding of the rise and fall of the use of socialization in sociology, we conducted a search for the usage in Web of Science (WoS) and JSTOR. The WoS search was a topic search for socializ* or socialisation, covering abstracts, titles, keywords, and the WoS keywords plus feature, which gave us a universe of terms in order to analyze the larger body of socializations usage. Due to incomplete coverage in WoS for all journals of interest, we also searched via JSTOR for particular subfield journals. Duplicates were removed from the database. In total, we captured 708 articles that used the term socialization (or a variant, such as socialize) across 13 journals, starting in 1912. This included the 3 flagship sociology journals (*American Sociological Review*, *American Journal of Sociology*, and *Social Forces*) and 10 specialty journals. As **Figure 1** reveals, the use of the word socialization and similar terms first peaked and fell at roughly the same time as the rise and fall of structural functionalism, though the use of the term has been more persistent in specialty journals, such as *Sociology of Education* and *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. *Social Forces* has also seen a recent uptick in use
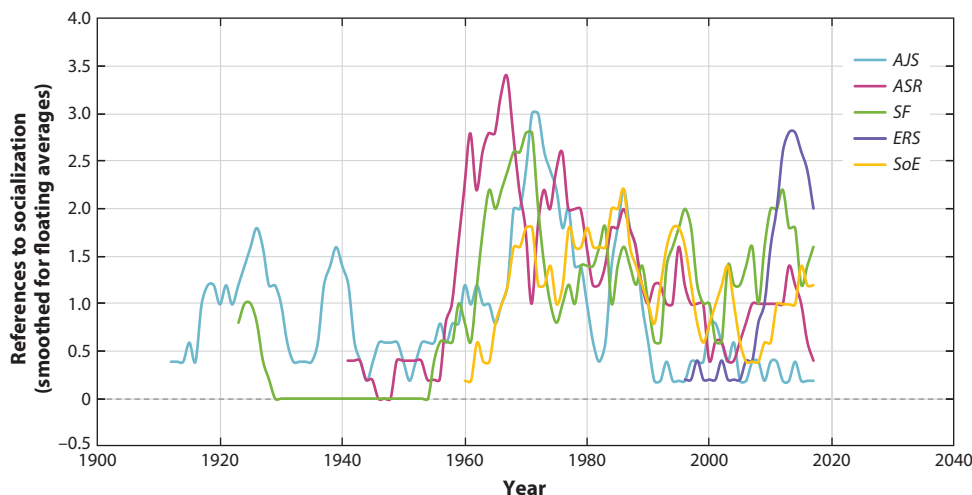
Figure 1

Five-year moving average of the use of socialization in sociology journals. Abbreviations: *AJS*, *American Journal of Sociology*; *ASR*, *American Sociological Review*; *ERS*, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*; *SF*, *Social Forces*; *SoE*, *Sociology of Education*.

of the term, though still not close to its functionalist peak[1]. A full list of the journals and more on instances of usage are provided in the **Supplemental Appendix**.

While use of the term socialization has declined since its functionalist peak, this does not mean that the term has been abandoned entirely. Rather, as we see in **Figure 1**, the term has continued to be used, and in some cases use has even increased in some subfield journals. That includes *Ethnic and Racial Studies* and *Sociology of Education*, which are now the two sociology journals in our analysis where the term is most likely to be used. This finding is important for two reasons. First, it suggests that research centering the concept of socialization has largely been pushed out of generalist sociology journals and into subfield journals. Second, and as we discuss in a subsequent section, What Gets Lost Without Socialization, this pattern points to the continued usefulness of the term socialization for making sense of situations in which a person is brought into a social world not entirely of their own choosing and over which they lack a significant amount of control. That includes students in classrooms, children in families, and people of color in primarily White settings.

We suspect that socialization has continued to be used in these cases because they involve massive imbalances of power that make socialization quite apparent. In a *Sociology of Education* article, for example, Gansen (2017, p. 255) uses ethnographic observations in preschool classrooms to examine the "gendered sexual socialization children receive from teachers' practices and reproduce through peer interactions." Gansen reveals how, through teachers' responses to children's behavior (e.g., heterosexual romantic play, bodily displays, and unwanted touching), children learn that "boys have gendered power over girls' bodies" (Gansen 2017, p. 255) and then reproduce those understandings in interactions with teachers and peers. Similarly, Allen (2016, p. 1831), in an *Ethnic and Racial Studies* article, uses interviews with Black men and their sons to examine how fathers prepared their sons "for encounters with racism" and also "modelled to their sons how to navigate racialized spaces as black men."

ALTERNATIVES TO SOCIALIZATION

Even as the use of socialization declined and shifted to specific subfield discussions, sociologists still needed ways of talking about the key processes and phenomena of social reproduction. These scholars strove to disentangle the many subtle and complex ways that people receive, resist, negotiate, reject, and creatively make use of the messages they encounter in society, providing greater depth to the study of social reproduction than is available in more unilinear models of social reproduction.

Bourdieu's work has been helpful for many scholars as an alternative to functionalist models of socialization. Bourdieu's language has also served as a tool for other scholars to use in pushing against reductionist explanations of the link between culture and poverty, such as Carter's (2005) nondominant cultural capital. And yet, while these scholars might use Bourdieusian terms like habitus, capital, or field, they all imply something like socialization, even without using the word, or using it only in reference to other scholars' use of the term (e.g., Gaddis 2013, Sallaz 2010). A few studies of culture and inequality do combine discussions of Bourdieu while explicitly

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[1]We date the functionalist peak by using Google Ngrams to trace the use of "Talcott Parsons" (a steady rise from around 1940 to 1970, at which a steep decline begins). The phrases functionalism and structural functionalism show a steady increase, though this might be because they are discussed negatively after a certain point. However, Parsonian language such as social value-orientations shows spikes in 1951, 1965, and 1978, then steady decline. This description of Parsonian functionalism peaking and then abating is widely described in the literature (see, for example, Stevens 2008).

describing socialization, including Bonilla-Silva et al.'s (2006, p. 229) study of how racial residential and social segregation "furthers a socialization process [they] refer to as 'white habitus,'" Calarco's (2018) study of different forms of help-seeking behavior in working-class and middle-class students, Lewis-McCoy's (2014) study of the processes by which White parents hoard opportunities in racially diverse suburban schools, and Dumais's (2002) study of gendered participation in cultural activities among high school students.

Similarly, while Lareau (2003) uses the term socialization in her Bourdieusian analysis of social class differences in family life, she uses it sparingly. As she explains in a footnote,

> In this book, I primarily use the concept of child rearing, but at times I also use the term *socialization*. Many sociologists have vigorously criticized this concept, noting that it suggests (inaccurately) that children are passive rather than active agents and that the relationship between parents and their children is unidirectional rather than reciprocal and dynamic... Nonetheless, existing terms can, ideally, be revitalized to offer more sophisticated understandings of social processes. Child rearing and socialization have the virtue of being relatively succinct and less jargon laden than other alternatives. As a result, I use them. (Lareau 2003, pp. 4–7)

Despite these benefits, however, and given the pushback that Lareau describes, most efforts to reconcile culture and poverty find replacement words for socialization.

Scholars of youth and peer cultures have also pushed back against a functionalist model of socialization and, in doing so, offered alternative ways of talking about similar processes (Milner 2013). For example, British sociologist Willis (1981, p. 183) used Marxian analysis to criticize how "mainstream sociology. . . . with its notion of socialisation, and its implication of passive transmission, misses the tension and uncertainty" of social reproduction. In his classic ethnography, he examined how working-class "lads" in England created a culture of resistance that protected them from feelings of failure in school while simultaneously reproducing working-class outcomes. The generation of cultural studies research that came out of the Birmingham school of cultural studies similarly showed the critical role that subcultures and scenes play in developing youth and adolescent style, modes of communication, use of symbols, and propensity to violence (Beier 2016, Goldstein & Kadlubov 1998, Muggleton 2000; see also Corsaro & Rizzo 1988, Fox & Miller-Idriss 2008). Such work refined our understanding of the fluidity of social reproduction processes. Social reproduction was not merely characterized by a bimodal distribution of successful incorporation versus deviance, such scholars argued, but was better represented by fragmented and circuitous routes to adulthood that had many pathways and off-ramps on the way to various outcomes.

Finally, the study of social interactions, one of the oldest traditions in United States sociology, has emphasized how people habituate certain behaviors via local organizational routines and interactions. The two most emblematic of these arguments are Becker's (1953) study of "becoming a marihuana user" and Goffman's (1961) study of the "moral career of the mental patient," both of which inspired future sociologists to use "becoming a. . ." and "career of. . ." as templates for title and form. These arguments differed in important ways from the functionalist model, rooted in both methodological commitments to in situ meaning-making and theoretical suspicions of internalized values or characteristics as the drivers of social action. Instead, these authors emphasize that a sense of self and an understanding of the world are always an interactional achievement not necessarily predicted by anything internal to the actor before the situation, stimulus, or organizational form in question. Habituation is therefore not a working out of internalized norms but rather an alignment of organizational routines and significant others' definitions of the situation with actors' own habituated interpretations of their experiences. As such, this thing-like-socialization, echoing the authors' pragmatist influences, is always contingent and subject to change.

While these alternative models of social reproduction are not necessarily irreconcilable with the idea of socialization, they are quite distinct from the simplified unilinear model—what might be called a downloading model—that functionalist socialization has come to represent. As such, these approaches represent longstanding critiques of the functionalist model extending all the way back to Becker and Goffman's mid-century work. The critiques come together in a broader push to see individuals as agentic, active interpreters of their social and cultural worlds (Corsaro 1992, Corsaro & Rizzo 1988, Griswold 1987), often through emphasizing the centrality of practices and embodiment (Lizardo 2009, Wacquant 2004). Decades after the demise of functionalism, it is worth considering what these newer concepts are successful at capturing and what they miss. What, if anything, was lost as socialization fell out of favor? How might socialization still have value for sociology?

WHAT GETS LOST WITHOUT SOCIALIZATION

While various theories of social reproduction can accomplish much of what the term socialization is intended to do, we argue that key pieces are still lost, including historicity, transferability, and a sensitivity to asymmetries of power. Of course, some might say these very deficiencies characterized functionalist models of socialization, and to some degree this is our point: functionalist socialization is not the only game in town.

Losing Power

As noted above, our analysis of the use of socialization in sociological journals reveals that studies of gender, race, sexuality, and class continue to emphasize the word socialization, especially outside of the central journals of the *American Sociological Review* and the *American Journal of Sociology*. We suggest that part of the reason socialization has maintained its usefulness in these subfields—in contrast to similar terms like mediation or negotiation or habituation—is that socialization is able to engage the ongoing asymmetries of power through which structures of oppression are reproduced (e.g., Bonilla-Silva et al. 2006, Burt et al. 2012, Gansen 2017, Hagerman 2014). Certainly, the role of power within social reproduction can be explained using other language, most prominently Bourdieu's dialectical relationship between field and habitus. And it is fair to say that previous iterations of socialization, especially those with a more functionalist bent, were insufficiently sensitive to the role of power in reproducing social life.

Yet the concept of socialization captures something important about being brought into a social world not entirely of your own choosing and about which you lack a significant amount of control. Scholars of systematically marginalized identities and communities are acutely sensitive to how agentic and creative those within their studies can be, yet they are also aware that institutions like race and gender (and processes like racism and patriarchy) are so powerful that such agency and creativity can only go so far. As such, the study of racial socialization remains critical in analysis of families (Banks 2012, Hordge-Freeman 2015), parenting (Allen 2016, Butler-Barnes et al. 2017, Dow 2016, Gonzalez 2019, Hagerman 2014), politics (Nunnally 2010), and segregation/discrimination (Bonilla-Silva et al. 2006, Burt et al. 2012). In a much-cited article, Hughes (2006) and her coauthors describe how parents of various races and ethnicities socialize their children, pointing out different mechanisms of enculturation, bias, mistrust, and egalitarianism while asking how certain characteristics of families, parents, and children might differently affect when and how socialization occurs.

Besides racial socialization, there is also the question of how racial minorities are affected by broader socialization efforts. In her study of Black students in elementary schools, Tyson (2003)

shows how schools' hidden curriculum of cultural socialization does harm to young Black children, emphasizing behavioral regulations "to transmit to [B]lack students dominant cultural norms to which they were expected to conform both in school and in the wider society" (Tyson 2003, p. 332). Similarly, Shedd (2015, p. 33) acknowledges in her study of four Chicago public high schools that "society as a whole benefits when schools accomplish their missions of socialization and accultur- ation." Yet the nature of that socialization can be alienating rather than empowering, particularly regarding students' growing awareness of the injustice inherent in a stratified social order. Parsons himself insisted that socialization does not make everyone the same; indeed, part of the function of socialization is to recognize and accept one's relative status and rank. The difference, as Shedd (2015) argues in her discussion of how encounters with police socialize young people, is that for her, socialization does not mean adapting oneself to a social order so much as it means becoming reflexively aware of the problems with that order and how its benefits are not distributed equally.

Other scholars have continued to use socialization as well. Sociologists of sex, gender, and sex- uality have emphasized the role of socialization (Carter 2014, Gansen 2017, Garner & Grazian 2016, Pascoe 2013, Perry 2015) even as they have adapted the concept following earlier critiques, especially those of West & Zimmerman (1987). Connell's (2005) classic work on masculinities uses the word socialization but makes clear such socialization is not necessarily harmonious and is al- ways subject to change given new socializing institutions, organizations, and situations. Likewise, Risman & Davis (2013) show how socialization has problematic connotations, especially with its historical connection to "sex roles," yet is also a necessary mechanism for how gender as structure reproduces itself. Similarly, scholars of migration and nationalism have continued to find the term socialization useful to describe how migrants and their children are affected by their destination country (Landolt & Goldring 2009, Röder 2015), even if many use similar though not identical terms like assimilation instead (Waters & Jiménez 2005). Finally, scholars of class distinction con- tinue using the word socialization to describe how different classes teach young people (Calarco 2018, Singh-Manoux & Marmot 2005) or new members of an organization (Levy & Sasson-Levy 2008) how to interact with their social world. One of the most famous (and controversial) scholars of the socialization of class difference, Bernstein (2003), never abandoned the term throughout his prolific career.

For scholars studying systems of race, gender, class, migration, and sexuality, as well as those studying other powerful institutional identities, the term socialization usefully emphasizes how these identities are developed and rendered powerful in ways beyond any one actor's control. For some of these scholars, socialization is also a useful concept for highlighting the competing influence of different and intersecting sources of socialization in individual lives (e.g., for queer immigrants and queer people of color) (Ocampo 2014, Romero 2017). We suggest that the on- going use of socialization within each of these subfields points to the terms' continued utility in analyses of how power imbalances develop via the internalization of group processes.

Losing History

Without socialization, it is easy to lose sight of how people came to know the culture they know. When scholars focus on the incoherence of culture or on people's agency in cultural processes, culture can sometimes be described as simply available (Tavory 2010). The sources of people's strategies and cultural tools are left relatively unexplained. Certainly, the fact that people know more culture than they use (DiMaggio 1997, Swidler 2003) is an important rejoinder to func- tionalist models of socialization, yet other conceptualizations of socialization can simultaneously acknowledge that culture is heterogeneous and recognize how culture's constraints are histori- cally situated and rooted in differences of power. To be clear, how people learn culture is not the

same thing as historical continuity, or, for that matter, historical change (Sewell 1992). When we say sociologists lose history, we mean they lose focus on the historical processes through which certain culture becomes available or unavailable, salient or not salient.

Of course, no project can or should answer every question. Not everyone seeking to explain or understand particular actions has to provide their historical and biographical basis as well. Yet the net effect of centering agency and heterogeneity can be an inordinate focus on how culture works rather than why (Vaisey 2014), of what people do in certain contexts rather than how it came to be the case that these are the ways they have learned to act. Yet questions of socialization remain: How are people socialized into situational codes, and how do they come to prefer certain situations over others? How do they learn to adjudicate the successful completion of a situation, or even to know what success would be (Winchester & Guhin 2019)?

Losing Transferability

Without socialization, it is also more difficult to see the parallels between learning processes described in different academic disciplines. Bourdieu's model of social reproduction, for example, tends to replace the concept of socialization with his "somewhat idiosyncratic, and in many ways unwieldly theoretical vocabulary—one that has never been coherently incorporated into Anglophone cultural analysis" (Lizardo 2017, p. 89). While terms like cultural capital and habitus have been exported as individual units from Bourdieu's oeuvre, these concepts lose much of their analytical heft when they are isolated from Bourdieu's overall theory of the field. As such, Bourdieu's vocabulary takes a long time to learn and understand, making its usage much more likely to remain within the particular subfields of sociology where it is most widely understood.

Indeed, even if Bourdieu's individual concepts have diffused quite widely across sociology, these terms are not necessarily well known outside of sociology and neither are the terms used together in the way that can explain socialization rather than socialization's effects. Cultural capital, for example, is an important concept that can explain why and how certain people connect to others, but without field, habitus, and a bevy of other concepts, the term loses the historicist precision of Bourdieu's overall project. There is also the problem that Bourdieu's vocabulary has a Hobbesian war-of-all-against-all baggage attached to it, perhaps running the risk of moving too far from a Parsonian optimism into a Nietzschean (or at least Pascalian) pessimism (Alexander 1995, Gorski 2016).

Such linguistic ambiguity, and the insularity it generates, has been a problem with many terms developed as alternatives to socialization. In his writing on childhood socialization, Corsaro argues that other scholars of socialization, especially Parsons, ignore children's agency in interpreting and often resisting the influence of the adult world. Based on his empirical work in preschools, Corsaro shows how socialization occurs not as the private internalization of externally imposed values, norms, or habits, but rather through a "social and collective process" of "interpretive reproduction" (Corsaro 1992, p. 161; see also Corsaro & Rizzo 1988) most conspicuous in peer group interaction. Yet Corsaro (2018, p. 398) also makes clear that there are many ways to conceptualize the term, preferring constructivism, "a model of socialization in which the child is seen as an agent and eager learner." Ultimately, however, Corsaro's (1992) notion of "interpretive reproduction" has never really taken root outside the sociology of children and youth. Thus, although other terms might not share the baggage unique to socialization, they are plagued by the problem of new language, in that it takes time and collective agreement before they can be widely understood and adequately applied.

Socialization, as a term, does not have this problem of transferability. Of course, the specific usage of the term, and the phenomena to which it is applied, might vary across different fields and

subfields. But we would argue that, even if those uses are not perfectly consistent, having a shared terminology allows scholars from different subfields and disciplines to recognize similarities in their work. So, even though new terms can provide new insights, adding too many new terms—rather than adapting old ones—can make the discipline's theoretical core unwieldly and, ironically, ungenerative (Besbris & Khan 2017). The usage of local language is obviously not a problem in the sciences, and it is by no means unique to sociology, but to the degree that sociologists want to speak across subfields and even to other academic disciplines, it will be useful to settle on common terms (Vaisey & Valentino 2018). Socialization is one such common term.

Reimagining Socialization

In outlining what is lost without the term socialization, we do not argue that sociologists should embrace a functionalist model or definition of socialization. Rather, our point is to suggest that because of the term's broad recognizability across fields and subfields, its usefulness for speaking about the origins of culture, and its sensitivity to problems of power, there is value in imagining a postfunctionalist approach to socialization—one consistent with the continued use of the term in research on asymmetries of power. In the same way that the words culture and gender do not mean what they meant 50 years ago, there is no reason to assume socialization must as well.

NEW DIRECTIONS IN SOCIALIZATION RESEARCH

If sociologists do choose to reimagine and reembrace the term socialization, what might that agenda look like? How would it differ from earlier approaches? We suggest a few additional lines of research that could further recenter socialization while being sensitive to the importance of heterogeneity, power, and agency.

Socialization from Minds and Society to Bodies and Brains

The past 30 years have seen rapid growth in sociological interest in cognition (Lizardo & Strand 2010, Zerubavel 2009), with an increased focus on the role of neuroscience (Cerulo 2010) and psychology (Miles et al. 2019) in explaining sociological phenomena. Perhaps because the term socialization has not met such dramatic opposition in psychology and social psychology (including sociological social psychology; e.g., Elder 1994, Garner & Grazian 2016), these works often continue to use the concept of socialization, although often with a much sharper focus on specific processes of cognition and embodiment. For example, Luft's work shows how cognitive distinctions that make enemies into moral others are not so much the causes of killing but rather the result of killing, part of "unfolding processes of combat socialization and in turn dehumanization" (Luft 2015, p. 166).

Luft's work is part of a growing set of ethnographic and theoretical works that examine secondary socialization, that is, the socialization of adults (Lizardo 2018). Another example of this genre is Winchester and his coauthor's series of articles on adult converts to new social settings (Winchester 2016, Winchester & Green 2019), each emphasizing how embodied cognition (Shapiro 2019) aligns people's various expectations of themselves with their various surroundings.

In different ways, these works draw on the "dual process framework" of culture (Lizardo et al. 2016). This framework stems from Vaisey's (2009) work on motivation and justification but has also generated significant debate regarding the distinctions between thinking discursively versus thinking practically (Vaisey 2009) and knowing how versus knowing that (Lizardo 2017).

In his call for an improved cultural analysis, Lizardo (2017) attempts to bring together many of these distinctions. He describes how cultural knowledge is individually "enculturated,"

making different kinds of culture differentially, sometimes redundantly, available to an actor. Yet, as he later wrote, "contemporary culture and cognition scholars in sociology have seldom laid out explicitly what are the consequences of taking cognition seriously for understanding socialization processes" (Lizardo 2018). By emphasizing a more embodied understanding of both cognition and socialization (Toren 1999), Lizardo provides a way for the concept of socialization to overcome many of the criticisms of the functionalist model described above.

More Insights About Embodiment from Linguistic Anthropology and Conversation Analysis

Scholars of language acquisition and usage are necessarily interested in socialization. The learning of a language, especially a first language, involves precisely the kinds of power imbalances and limited control often implied by the term socialization. Yet recent research reveals that language socialization is not as obviously one-sided as it may appear. Linguistic anthropologists, linguists, and scholars of conversation analysis (Brown & Gaskins 2014, Toren 1999) have shown how language acquisition and ability are managed with more agency, heterogeneity, and historical contingency than a functionalist model of socialization would allow.

Central to these insights is the counterintuitive insistence that language is neither the central model nor the primary mechanism of culture. Following this insight, scholars—even linguistic anthropologists—recognize that they need more than words to understand meaning. To know what and how things mean might well begin by looking at words and the patterns in which they appear, but it is what comes before, after, and alongside words that scholars of language have recognized as even more fundamental (Goodwin 2018, Ochs 1999). Even conversation analysis (Stivers 2018) has come to appreciate that many of the most important ways in which meaning is communicated, understood, and experienced are not only subconscious (which is not necessarily difficult for a Parsonian to acknowledge) but also embodied and situational in ways that necessarily relate to the material space of the physical world (see also Bourdieu 1977, Taylor et al. 2019). Language acquisition and usage are embodied experiences, rooted in deep evolutionary adaptations that precede dangling modifiers by millions of years (Tomasello 2019).

Future sociological work on socialization can build off of these insights by examining how other social processes are socialized within and alongside language itself and all the many social processes that undergird and go alongside the development of language. Indeed, this insight is already present in classic sociological work on how children learn about race and gender alongside racism and sexism (Feagin & Van Ausdale 2001, Thorne 1993).

Being Pragmatic About It

The pragmatist revival (Jansen 2017, Joas 2000, Schneiderhan 2011) in recent sociological work builds on sociology's relationship to pragmatism all the way back to the Chicago school through the work of Becker and Goffman and is maintained most notably in symbolic interactionism and certain forms of ethnography. What distinguishes this new pragmatist sociology is its more explicit acknowledgment of influences, especially an emphasis on John Dewey's theory of habits (Camic 1986).

In many ways, pragmatist socialization might seem a contradiction in terms. The functionalist roots of the term socialization make it seem bound to a commitment to shared goal attainment, which directly contradicts a Deweyan focus on ends-in-view rather than ultimate ends (Dewey 1958 [1922]). Yet Dewey, a scholar of childhood and education, continually emphasized habits as a central component of both social life itself and any attempt to understand it. The difference is

that habits are always means rather than ends, thus requiring and, in fact, creating a reflexivity that is both necessary for meaningful social interaction and somewhat inevitable given the tendency of habituated action to run into obstructions (Miettinen et al. 2012). Critics of pragmatism argue that its focus on innovation and changing of habits can sometimes go too far (Rawls 2011, p. 280), making it more difficult to account for social reproduction. And yet pragmatism, especially as worked out by Dewey, is not so much opposed to continuity as it is continually aware of its capacity for rupture (Gross 2018).

The Value of Values?

Recent work on values and norms offers a useful direction for recentering socialization in sociology. Critics of functionalist socialization emphasize the problems of focusing too centrally on values and norms as the engines of social reproduction, thereby ignoring power, agency, and the possibility that values and norms themselves are constantly shifting and heterogeneous (Swidler 2003). Yet recent work has shown that sociologists' use of values and norms to explain social action can account for the complexity, agency, and power that Parsons and other functionalists have missed (Hitlin & Piliavin 2004, Horne & Mollborn 2020).

In his call for the "(re)genesis of values," Miles (2015) references Joas's (2000) pragmatist reinterpretation of a sociology of values to build off of Schwartz's (2010) work on the structure of values and critiques of Parsonian action theory to argue that values are "causally linked to behavior" (Miles 2015, p. 698). However, in contrast to "consensus-oriented, often tautological functionalist work on values," he suggests a "cognitively plausible, empirically supported framework that can accommodate conflict and consensus" (Miles 2015, p. 699) by situating values in the automatic cognition described in dual process models. While Miles does not explicitly engage the question of socialization, his argument that values are part of our habituated, automatic consciousness suggests an important place for socialization in values research (Hitlin 2011; though see Martin & Lembo 2020 for a critique of "values").

Political Socialization and the Renewed Importance of Ideology

Political scientists' work on ideological socialization also offers insights for recentering socialization in sociology. Despite facing critiques similar to those in sociology, political scientists have managed to revive socialization research in the past twenty years (Niemi & Hepburn 1995, Sapiro 2004). Political scientists, like sociologists, learned to pay more attention to the heterogeneity within and conflict between various socializing influences, also emphasizing the role of young people and newcomers to institutions not only as receivers of political beliefs and practices but also as political actors in their own right.

In their re-envisioned models of socialization, political scientists leave ample room to examine problems of inequality and power. Unsurprisingly to sociologists of racism and sexism, political scientists find that political socialization is a deeply gendered and racialized set of processes. Bos and coauthors (2020) describe how, even in elementary school, boys express greater interest in politics and deeper political ambition than girls. Similarly, work on immigrant political socialization (Landolt & Goldring 2009) shows how immigrants' politics—and the socialization of immigrants' politics—is not simply a question of general or segmented assimilation but rather a series of complicated, multi-layered interactions. While some of this work on political socialization has been undertaken by sociologists (McFarland & Thomas 2006), sociology still has much to add. Sociological work may also be particularly useful in answering the call for more intersectional work on these topics, especially on racial and political socialization (Nunnally 2012).

Political sociologists' renewed interests in ideology (Jost 2006) also offers an important opening for socialization research. Much of the current work focuses on ideologies related to White supremacy (Bonilla-Silva 2003) and patriarchy (Manne 2017). While the reproduction of ideology is a classic concern of Marxian analysis (e.g., Althusser 1971), the contemporary study of ideology has been primarily focused on describing how ideology works rather than how it is reproduced across time. This gives sociologists another important new direction in which they could take the study of socialization.

Toward a New Theory of Socialization

There are many possible permutations of these new directions and criticisms, and to give these various moving pieces due consideration would require more space than we have here. However, we end by suggesting Winchester & Guhin's (2019) study of "normative frames" as one theory of socialization that incorporates the criticism and new directions we describe above. The article critiques Swidler's (2003) theory of cultural tools by drawing on Goffman and Dewey to develop a theory of normative frames. Actors learn and embody these frames, thereby developing successful capacities for understanding when and how to use certain practices, as well as how to adjudicate whether that practice has been successful.

Through using the cases of students at an evangelical high school and recent converts at an evangelical church, Winchester & Guhin (2019) show how evangelical prayer is a cultural tool in the way that Swidler describes, but it is a tool whose success becomes legible and achievable through learning the local context of a certain organization and putting oneself under the power of that organization (consciously or unconsciously). While Winchester and Guhin do not emphasize power or politics in this piece, these additions could be easily made to a model that already includes much of what we have been discussing—including pragmatism, normativity, embodiment, and organizational history—and that they describe as applicable to many other social institutions, including marriage and celebrity.

Such a new theory of socialization is not limited to cultural tools or institutions: Instead, what is important is the way that people habituate particular means of normative evaluation, within a context that is simultaneously morally imbued and marked by asymmetric power. These socialization processes are then helpful to explain a wide variety of microlevel processes with meso- and macrolevel implications, not dissimilar from Parsons's own concern with explaining structural congruity via local interaction, yet with a readier capacity to recognize the heterogeneity, power, and history lacking in functionalist accounts.

CONCLUSION

The concept of socialization often brings with it all the problems associated with structural functionalism: a lack of attention to history and heterogeneity, an obfuscation and reification of power imbalances, and an incapacity to recognize conflict as constitutive. So why should we keep socialization if it has all this baggage? Couldn't scholars of socialization do their work without the word (Nash 2003)?

The short answer is yes, of course they could—and they have been. To drop the word socialization entirely would not put an end to the sociological study of social reproduction, and neither would it permanently mar our capacity to explain social life. However, we argue that bringing the concept (and word) socialization back into the sociological mainstream would do more good than harm. We suggest that many of the criticisms of the word socialization are actually criticisms of structural functionalism, and that socialization is already being used by scholars across the social sciences—including many sociologists—in ways that overcome those problems. Such research

actively embraces the term socialization and uses it to emphasize historicity, the overarching power of social structures, and the importance of transferability to other academic disciplines.

Certainly, there is still work to do, and we suggest that developments at many of sociology's borders either have themselves emphasized socialization or are ideally located for such interventions. These borders include sociological interactions with cognitive science, pragmatism, the social psychological study of values, and the renewed focus on political socialization and ideology in political science and philosophy. Through each of these settings, and in many more, particularly the study of racial and gender socialization, sociologists can develop a theory of socialization that is at once pithily transferrable to other academic disciplines and sociologically sensitive to older problems with the term.

To be clear, there is still much to figure out about the processes and mechanisms within socialization, and these are questions for which replacements to socialization—including the work of Pierre Bourdieu—can be quite helpful. Yet these insights can happen within a broader paradigm of socialization rather than as a replacement of it. After all, scholars of socialization have more agency than was previously believed.

SUMMARY POINTS

1. The concept of socialization is a central set of mechanisms for early models of social reproduction, representing the social processes that bring people in line with the status quo. However, even if it is not quite the same as what Parsons argued, socialization came to be understood as a downloading model without sufficient focus on agency, incoherence, and conflict.

2. Like the functionalists who introduced the concept, socialization has fallen out of favor, critiqued for its lack of attention to power and agency, for its teleology and incoherence, and for its link to misguided culture of poverty arguments that blame victims and support deficit thinking.

3. Analyses of WoS and JSTOR articles in key sociology journals, from 1912 through 2020, reveal that peak use of the term socialization roughly coincided with the high point of structural functionalism, then precipitously declined. In the *American Sociological Review* and the *American Journal of Sociology*, the term's use has remained low; appearances of the term have been more persistent in *Sociology of Education* and *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, with *Social Forces* also seeing a recent uptick in use of the term, albeit still far below its functionalist peak. These findings suggest that discussions of socialization have been pushed out of the most prestigious generalist journals and into subfield journals instead.

4. As downloading models of socialization fell out of favor, sociologists developed alternative terms and concepts to account for social reproduction. That includes Bourdieu's model of habitus and cultural capital; Willis and others' work on resistance; work by Becker, Goffman, and others on habituation and interaction; and Corsaro's concept of interpretive reproduction.

5. While alternative theories of social reproduction can accomplish much of what the term socialization is intended to do, we argue that key pieces are still lost, including historicity, transferability, and a sensitivity to asymmetries of power. Of course, some might say these very deficiencies characterized functionalist models of socialization, and to some degree this is our point: functionalist socialization is not the only game in town.

6. Consistent with our argument, we find that studies of gender, race, sexuality, and class continue to emphasize the word socialization, and they do so in part because the term engages the ongoing asymmetries of power through which structures of oppression are reproduced. The concept of socialization captures something important about being brought into a social world not entirely of your own choosing and about which you lack a significant amount of control. Scholars of systematically marginalized identities and communities are acutely sensitive to how agentic and creative those within their studies can be, yet they are also aware that institutions like race and gender and processes like racism and patriarchy are so powerful that such agency and creativity can only go so far.

7. Because of socialization's broad recognizability across fields and subfields, its usefulness for speaking about the origins of culture, and its sensitivity to problems of power, there is value in imagining a postfunctionalist approach to this term. In the same way that the words culture and gender do not mean what they meant 50 years ago, there is no reason to assume socialization must as well.

8. A postfunctionalist agenda for socialization research would bring the concept back to the center of the discipline, particularly as a mechanism for reinforcing and resisting systems of oppression. Future socialization research could also build off sociological work engaging cognitive science, linguistic anthropology, pragmatism, and the reinterrogation of values. Speaking to recent work in political science, philosophy, and sociology, socialization research could also examine the development and reinforcement of ideology in political socialization. We suggest Winchester & Guhin's (2019) study of normative frames as one possible example of a post-functionalist study of socialization that integrates many elements of this agenda.

FUTURE ISSUES

1. Continued research on socialization and its relationship to systems of oppression should not be isolated in subfield journals but rather should have a place of prominence within the discipline as a whole. Specifically, sociology should pay greater attention to research on socialization as a mechanism for both reinforcing and resisting systems of oppression.

2. Speaking to the intersection of neuroscience, psychology, and sociology, future research should consider the role of cognition in socialization, examining how different forms of thinking show up in the first place. This work could build on Lizardo's (2017) call for an improved cultural analysis and also use tools from linguistic anthropology and conversation analysis to consider how socialization occurs within and alongside language.

3. Recent work on values, norms, and ideology offers insights for recentering socialization in sociology. Recent work in this area has attended to the heterogeneity within and conflict between various socializing influences and also emphasized the role of young people and newcomers to institutions not only as receivers of values and political beliefs but also as moral and political actors in their own right.

4. While the problem is not unique to the explanation of social reproduction, sociologists face a tension in their use of terms between, on the one hand, novelty and analytical precision and, on the other hand, transferability within sociological subdisciplines and

across sociology. Future work can continue to examine how to make socialization work as a productive theory useful for both sociologists and broader publics.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

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