

Socialization: The Life Course

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial will cover socialization and the life course, through the definition and discussion of:

1. Socialization and the Life Course
 - a. Childhood
 - b. Adolescence
 - c. Adulthood
 - d. Old Age

1. SOCIALIZATION AND THE LIFE COURSE

During your life course, your **socialization** is defined by certain stages. Your biology and culture combine as you age to delineate stages of life. Each stage has different challenges.



TERM TO KNOW

Socialization

The lifelong process of learning one's culture and of internalizing the norms and behaviors considered appropriate of adults in society.

1a. Stage 1: Childhood

The first stage of **childhood** encompasses roughly the first 12 years of your life from the time you're born until you're 12. In the United States, people put a premium on the 'innocence' of the child, meaning that they don't want the child to grow up too fast. You've likely heard that expression. Childhood is valued as a time of carefree innocence and exploration of the world, and children who have to face adult stresses and problems in these crucially formative years are pitied. Childhood should be a time of unbridled play, exploration, and learning, free from any of the stresses of adult life.

However, all of these stages, including childhood, are socially constructed. The notions above represent a social construction of the idea of childhood. In other parts of the world, childhood like this doesn't exist--it's different. In other parts of the world, children have to work. They aren't able to have the innocence and exploration period that wealthy countries provide for their children.



TERM TO KNOW

Childhood

A socially constructed period of the life course that goes from birth to approximately age 12.

1b. Stage 2: Adolescence

Adolescence is typically associated with the teenage years, 13 to 19. Adolescence is a time of confusion, a feeling in between childhood, on the one hand, and adulthood on the other. You're not still a child, but you're also not yet an adult, which can cause a lot of confusion for individual negotiating these two conflicting patterns.



EXAMPLE If you've ever heard the phrase "angsty teen," it's because teens in this stage are living through these contradictions in roles. They don't know yet how to behave, so they have to figure out their role.



TERM TO KNOW

Adolescence

A socially constructed period of the life course that is associated with the teenage years that is often confusing to navigate because it is caught between childhood and adulthood.

1c. Stage 3: Adulthood

The largest stage of life is called **adulthood** and encompasses roughly ages 18 to 60. Your identity, personality, and worldview have largely been set. You can pursue your long-term goals in terms of your career, hobbies, family, children, etc.

Of course, jarring events can potentially happen to you that will disrupt your more stable sense of self, like a divorce, the death of someone close to you, or a serious illness. These can disrupt your stable sense of self, but by far, the overwhelming majority of adults are more stable than children and adolescents. With this stability then, and all these multiple roles, adults can feel stressed because they have to juggle multiple roles. Often, adults are workers or professionals, mothers and fathers, husbands and wives, and friends—all at the same time. Therefore, adulthood is a game of juggling different sets and different types of social relationships.



TERM TO KNOW

Adulthood

A socially constructed period of the life course that comes after the teenage years and goes until about age sixty. This is the period where most of our accomplishments take place, including raising a family and pursuing a career.

1d. Stage 4: Old Age

The final stage is **old age**, over 60 and beyond. This is a growing number in advanced societies because medical and technological advancements that came with the Industrial Revolution have made it possible for

people to live much longer. The Industrial Revolution has given people continually longer life expectancy, so what society will do with its aging population, and how it will treat them, become important questions. There's a particular academic discipline that is concerned with studying the aging and the elderly, both biologically and socially, called **gerontology**. It views elderly people as a **cohort**, which is a group of people united by some common characteristic, like age, occupation, etc., though typically age is used to define it.

IN CONTEXT

In American society, elderly people aren't always treated as nicely as they should be. For instance, youth is privileged over age. Everyone wants to stay young, active, and wrinkle free, with no gray hair. Men want to retain all of their hair. To grow old is sometimes looked upon with scorn or negativity. Seniors leave the workforce, then must be tended to by the younger generation.

This all combines to amount to a cultural privilege of youth over aging, which can in turn lead to what is called **ageism**, which is the discrimination against elderly people and the aging in society.

Conversely, society could celebrate the elderly and organize its social life around their wisdom and their influence. If this were the case, you'd be living in what is called a **gerontocracy**, which is a social structure in which the elderly have the most power, wealth, and prestige.

The Industrial Revolution basically erased gerontocracy. Gerontocracy is more common in traditional, more land-based societies in which older people are seen as much wiser--they own more, they've lived a lot longer, which isn't always an easy thing to do--so they are respected for their wisdom and their old age.



TERMS TO KNOW

Old Age

A socially constructed period of the life course that refers to the later years in life, generally those after sixty.

Gerontology

The study of the biological and social aspects of aging and the elderly.

Cohort

A group of people that share some common characteristic like age.

Ageism

Discrimination against the elderly and the ageing in society.

Gerontocracy

A social arrangement in which the elderly have the most power, wealth, and prestige.



SUMMARY

Today you learned about **socialization** and socially constructed stages of the **life course**.



TERMS TO KNOW

Adolescence

A socially constructed period of the life course that is associated with the teenage years that is often confusing to navigate because it is caught between childhood and adulthood.

Adulthood

A socially constructed period of the life course that comes after the teenage years and goes until about age sixty. This is the period where most of our accomplishments take place, including raising a family and pursuing a career.

Ageism

Discrimination against the elderly and the ageing in society.

Childhood

A socially constructed period of the life course that goes from birth to approximately age 12.

Cohort

A group of people that share some common characteristic like age.

Gerontocracy

A social arrangement in which the elderly have the most power, wealth, and prestige.

Gerontology

The study of the biological and social aspects of ageing and the elderly.

Old Age

A socially constructed period of the life course that refers to the later years in life, generally those after sixty.

Socialization

The lifelong process of learning one's culture and of internalizing the norms and behaviors considered appropriate of adults in society.