
Factors that Played a Role in My Transition from Childhood to Adolescent

Socialization Growing Up

From a very young age and all throughout my adolescence I was socialized by those around me. Beginning with the first people to socialize me, my family, I then went into school and then a peer group. As I got older I began to develop rolls, each one different depending upon who I am socializing with and how my past socialization taught me to be. Based upon the influence of each of these groups in my life I am shaped and molded to belief in certain ideologies, to feel a certain way about myself and to have developed mannerisms to allow me to function in society.

Growing up with a police officer as a father and a massage therapist as a mother I had contrasting values instilled within me. On one side I had to obey authority, follow rules and laws and live with the understanding that drugs and alcohol (in excess) will lead to negative outcomes. The other end, from my mother, I gained the more free spirit aspect of my personality. She taught me about my own spirituality, about the way my muscles work with emphasis on meditation, self care and peace. Looking back now I was brought up to be both obedient and free spirited, which are two parts of my personality that still carry with me today.

I was lucky to have parents with successful jobs who were a part of the middle class. According to Thio, "Various forces, however, influence the way parents socialize their children. The most significant of these forces is social class" (93). When I was brought up my brother and I never went hungry, and we always had new shoes if we grew out of our old ones. We took vacations every summer, but just went to local beaches rather than beaches far away. My life as a child was balanced between getting everything I needed and even wanted without the excess amount of toys and lavish vacations that some of my friend's families went on. This balance in my life helped me understand the value of money better than some of my friends had, and developed a better sense of who I was with the lack of smothering but never a need for the essentials.

My parents had taught me to speak up when it came to a girl bullying me in elementary school. They taught me to fix my own issues if they knew I was capable to do so, and to use my resources. This may have to do with the fact that they wanted me to be a stronger person as I grew, but according to Thio, "Middle class encourages independence, self-assertiveness and reasoning (93), perhaps being that my parents social status had more effect on me than merely the amount of vacations we took or the label of the clothes I wore. Their status allowed me

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enough room to grow and reason for myself, because I neither needed nor went without many things. It allowed me to ponder, create and explore because my family had the means to provide for my brother and I in that type of way.

My mother, more so than my father, had a larger impact on the way I perceived myself and the way I thought a woman should be. At the age of six or seven I began to take what she did as my own, this type of principal following me into my later years. This act is normal, and explained by Thio as, "Children pretend to be their mother and father, examples of their significant others" (85). My mother was always up to date on the latest diet trend from the Paleo, to Weight Watchers, to the South Beach diet. She loathed her body, pushed it to the limits working out and restricted calories, sugar and carbohydrates. Watching her as a child I remember seeing this as the "healthy" way to live. Her exact habits that she practiced began to be my habits only a few years after. Even through high school I had practiced unhealthy eating habits, only eating baby food for lunch, and had worked out excessively. The idea of being overweight, even in my underweight body at the time, terrified me. My mother always made encouraging comments in my birthday cards about her being able to finally see my thigh gap. To me, all of these behaviors were normal. I had not realized just unhealthy my mentality was until I came to college.

Due to the way that I was raised, to see food as your enemy and your body never good enough I saw myself as never good enough. With that reasoning about my body nothing else in my life could be good enough. Thio would describe "the self-image is what emerges from the looking-glass process can affect our personality and behavior" (85) and for me it did. I had identified myself with such negative traits because I was taught by people who love me that is how to act. I criticized others who did not agree with me because they were lazy slobs who just did not try hard enough. My thoughts and behaviors began to mirror those of my mother's while I was in high school.

Although, being the free spirited person that I am, school was difficult in the fact that "schools are more likely to contribute to uniformity," (Thio, 94) which was something I had hated. Making the transition from being unique and talented in my parents eyes to being in a group of my peers and treated as equal was difficult, especially in my younger years when I was stubborn and unwilling to listen to the rules. Growing older in high school I began to accept that this was simply the way that school worked and that "in fact schools provide children with their first training on how to behave in secondary groups" (Thio, 94). This was a time that was crucial for me to begin to understand more about socialization, which made me realize just how well I can flourish in a secondary group. I was able to feel competent enough to get a job at fourteen years old and to steadily rise in rank in that job faster than those hired at the same time as me. I recognized that I had an aptitude for the work environment as well as a strong work ethic.

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However, school can provide an environment full of peers where uniformity is encouraged which can be difficult for a teenage girl who is already extremely hard on herself with a body image and eating disorder developing. Being from a wealthy town with the majority of the residence being white like I am, the diversity that I saw around me was small, making any “flaw” I saw within myself, feel larger. The more uniformity there was, the worse I felt about myself. Being in a peer group did have its benefits in order to help me better myself and my socialization.

Being as rebellious as I was in high school, it was people I had associated myself with that allowed me to grow socially. As Thio describes, “Freeing themselves from the grip of parental and school authorities, peer groups often develop distinctive subcultures with their own values” (95) which is what I had done especially in college. I had learned that my mother’s way of living was destructive and sad and that my peers did not have such eating habits or negative ways of perceiving their bodies. I began to break free from the ideologies of my parents and decide for myself what I wanted to believe in and what I did not want to waste my time on. I decided that I did not believe in the same god that my family had and had adopted a new sense of my own spirituality. I looked to my peers for answers rather than my parents. This feeling was especially liberating to me because I finally had the support from my peers to accept my individuality rather than oppress it, as I had done before.

Lastly, the media has shaped how I perceived the world around me, outside of the small town that I lived in. The media showed me images of models and people who I should look up to as a teenager girl. Growing up closely with a brother had also exposed me to more violence than I felt comfortable with as his favorite shows and movies had to do with violence. Thio explains that , “...television tends to simulate violence-prone children to actual violence, to make normal children less sensitive to violence in real life” (96), which for my brother especially I was able to recognize. As I began to watch rated R movies I found myself having to remove myself from especially violent and brutal movies, while my brother would watch unfazed by the graphic content on the screen. This is perhaps because he watched more violent movies than I and played killing video games, but he became very much more desensitized to violence than I am. Overall, this demonstrated the impact that media can have on the mind of a young person, as they are beginning to develop their sense of self. As humans we are only able to deal with our socialization from what we see around us. This idea can be helpful instilling positive traits and qualities we can recognize within ourselves, or can be damaging and negative.

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