CHAPTER TWENTY

The Self and Adult Socialization

Everyone knows what the self is. It seems to avoid nicely that brace of faults, one or the other of which afflict most concepts of social science. It is not merely a lay term, togged up with a new polysyllabic definition that conceals all the ambiguities of the original, though not very well. Nor is it totally esoteric, a barbarous neologism whose relation to anything known to ordinary men is questionable. (The concept of criminal, as social scientists habitually use it, nicely illustrates the first difficulty. Examples of the second can be found in any sociology textbook.)

The notion of the self avoids these troubles. It is not a term that plays a role in ordinary discourse so that it acquires emotional overtones or gets involved in questions that give rise to argument. On the other hand, it is not totally foreign. We immediately have an intuitive apprehension of the direction in which the concept points, a general idea of the kind of thing it must be. When a social scientist speaks of the self we feel, with some relief, that for a change we know what he is talking about.

He is talking, of course, about the essential core of the individual, the part that calls itself "I," the part that feels, thinks and originates action. Or is he? For despite the seeming clarity of the concept, people do not seem to agree on what they mean by it. This should not be surprising because, in fact, no concept can be defined in isolation. Any concept is, explicitly or implicitly, part of a theoretical system and derives its true meaning from

its place in that system, from its relation to the other concepts of which the system is constructed. So the self means one thing in a sociologist's theory and another in a psychologist's, one thing (even among sociological theories) in a structural-functional theory and another in a theory based on symbolic interaction. When we accept the term intuitively we gloss over the differences it hides, differences due to the differing theoretical systems in which it has been embedded. Intuition conceals the disagreement we find when we explore the implications of the word.

In what follows I will approach the concept of self by suggesting the meaning it takes on in the framework of a theory of symbolic interaction, a theory that has long been of major importance in sociology. Of necessity, I will have to say a good deal about the symbolic character of human interaction, the nature of individual action, and the meaning of society before I can begin to speak of the self. But, having done so, I will then be able to proceed directly to the question of changes in the self during the years after childhood, a topic that has in the past few years become popular under the title "adult socialization."

Symbolic Interaction

The theory of symbolic interaction achieved for a time a commanding position in American sociology. Its dominance arose from the presence of George Herbert Mead at the University of Chicago at the very time that sociology was establishing its first American beachhead there. Mead was a philosopher who developed a theory of society and the self as interdependent parts of the same process, a theory that became integral to the tradition of sociological research that grew up a little later around the figure of Robert E. Park. Mead's theory of symbolic interaction (as it has lately come to be called) provided, with assists from Dewey and Cooley, the basic imagery sociologists used in their work.[1]

Other sources of theoretical support for sociology eventually grew up to dispute the Chicago School. But Mead's theory still seems to me to provide a representation of the character of social life and individual action that is unsurpassed for its fidelity to the nature of society as we experience it.[2]

The theory of symbolic interaction takes as its central problem this question: How is it possible for collective human action to occur? How can

1. See George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934); John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1930); and Charles Horton Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons), 1902.

2. See the explication in Herbert Blumer, "Sociological Implications of the Thought of George Herbert Mead," *American Journal of Sociology* 71 (March 1966), 535–544.

people come together in lines of action that mesh with one another in some-
thing we can call a collective act? By collective act we should understand
not simply cooperative activities, in which people consciously strive to
achieve some common goal, but any activity involving two or more people
in which individual lines of activity come to have some kind of unity and
coherence with one another. In a collective act, to smuggle part of the
answer into the definition, individual lines of action are *adjusted* to one
another. What I do represents an attempt on my part to come to terms
with what you and others have done, to so organize my action that you
in turn will be able to respond to it in some meaningful way. Playing a
string quartet embodies this notion of mutual adjustment of several in-
dividual lines of action. But so do less cooperative activities, such as
arguing or fighting, for even in them we mutually take account of what
each other does.

By asking how such collective actions are possible, the theory of symbolic
interaction marks out a distinctive subject matter and gives a distinctive
cast to the study of society. For we may, without exaggeration, regard all
of society and it component organizations and institutions as collective acts,
as organizations of mutually adjusted lines of individual activity, admit-
tedly of great complexity. A city, a neighborhood, a factory, a church, a
family—in each of these many people combine what they do to create a
more-or-less recurring pattern of interaction. By focusing on the phenom-
enon of mutual adjustment, the theory rises two kinds of questions: first,
what patterns of mutual adjustment exist, how do they arise and change,
and how do they affect the experience of individuals? Second, how is it pos-
sible for people to adjust their actions to those of others in such a way as to
make collective acts possible? Having raised the question of how collective
action is possible, it answers briefly by referring to the phenomenon of
mutual adjustment and then asks how that is possible.

The second question concerns us here. Mead, and those who have fol-
lowed him, explained the mutual adjustment of individual lines of activity
by invoking a connected set of conceptions: meaning, symbols, taking the
role of the other, society and the self. Actions come to have meaning in a
human sense when the person attributes to them the quality of foreshad-
owing certain other actions that will follow them. The meaning is the as
yet uncompleted portion of the total line of activity. Actions become sig-
nificant symbols when both the actor and those who are interacting with
him attribute to them the same meaning. The existence of significant
symbols allows the actor to adjust his activities to those of others by antic-
ipating their response to what he does and reorganizing his act so as to take
account of what they are likely to do if he does that. What we do when we

play chess—think to ourselves, "If I move here, he'll move there, so I'd better not do that"—is a useful model, although it suggests a more self-conscious process than is ordinarily at work.

The actor, in short, inspects the meaning his action will have for others, assesses its utility in the light of the actions that meaning will provoke in others, and may change the direction of his activity in such a way as to make the anticipated response more nearly what he would like. Each of the actors in a situation does the same. By so doing they arrive at mutually understood symbols and lines of collective action that mesh with one another and thus make society, in the large and in the small, possible. The process of anticipating the response of others in the situation is usually referred to as taking the role of the other.

Our conception of the self arises in this context. Clearly the actions of a person will vary greatly depending on the others whose role he takes. He learns over time from the people he ordinarily associates with certain kinds of meanings to attribute to actions, both his own and theirs. He incorporates into his own activity certain regularized expectations of what his acts will mean, and regularized ways of checking and reorganizing what he does. He takes, in addition to the role of particular others, what Mead referred to as the role of the generalized other, that is, the role of the organization of people in which he is implicated. In Mead's favorite example, the pitcher on a baseball team not only takes into accout what the batter is going to do in response to his next pitch, but also what the catcher, the infielders, and outfielders are going to do as well. Similarly, Strauss[3] has argued that when we use money we are taking into account, as a generalized other, the actions of all those who we know to be involved in handling money and giving monetary value to things: storekeepers, bosses, workers, bankers, and the government.

The self consists, from one point of view, of all the roles we are prepared to take in formulating our own line of action, both the roles of individuals and of generalized others. From another and complementary view, the self is best conceived as a process in which the roles of others are taken and made use of in organizing our own activities. The processual view has the virtue of reminding us that the self is not static, but rather changes as thoses we interact with change, either by being replaced by others or by themselves acting differently, presumably in response to still other changes in those they interact with.

I have presented a complicated theory in a very summary fashion. The reader who is interested in pursuing it further may be interested in Mead's

3. Anselm L. Strauss. "The Development and Transformation of Monetary Meanings in the Child." *American Sociological Review* 17 (June 1952), 275–286.

own writings, admittedly difficult, or may be satisfied with any of a number of good critical accounts already available.[4]

Adult Socialization

The current interest in adult socialization arose out of an attempt to generalize research in a great variety of fields on the changes that take place in people as they move through various institutional settings. Thus, some social psychologists had undertaken studies of the effects of participation in college life on college students; did the participation change them in any way? Others, out of an interest in the professions, had begun to explore the professional training of doctors, lawyers, nurses, and others. Still others, interested in medical sociology and social influences on mental health, had investigated the impact of mental hospitals and other kinds of hospitals on patients. Criminologists concerned themselves with the effects of a stay in prison on convicts, largely from a practical interest in how we might deal with problems of recidivism.

As workers in these different areas strove to find the general rubric under which all these studies might be subsumed and out of which might come propositions that were more abstract and more powerful, they were influenced by a desire common to most sociologists. They wanted to counter the common assumption that the important influences on a person's behavior occur in childhood, that nothing of much importance happens after that, observable changes being merely rearrangements of already existing elements in the personality. Since the term "socialization" had conventionally been applied to the formation of the personality in childhood, it seemed natural to indicate the belief that all change did not end with adolescence by speaking of "adult socialization," thus indicating that the same processes operated throughout the life cycle.[5]

The process of change indicated by the term can easily, and fruitfully, be conceptualized as a matter of change in the self. Our ways of thinking about our world and acting in it, arising as they do out of the responses of others we have internalized and now use to organize our own behavior prospectively, will change as the others with whom we interact change themselves or are replaced. These changes are precisely the ones students

4. See, for example, George J. McCall and J. L. Simmons, *Identities and Interactions* (New York: The Free Press, 1966).

5. Some of the major discussions of this theme include Orville G. Brim and Stanton Wheeler, *Socialization After Childhood* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1966); Howard S. Becker and Anselm L. Strauss, "Careers, Personality and Adult Socialization," in this volume; Anselm L. Strauss, *Mirrors and Masks* (New York: Free Press, 1959); and Robert K. Merton, Patricia Kendall, and George Reader, eds., *The Student Physician* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957).

of adult socialization have concerned themselves with, though they have not always used the language of symbolic interaction or the self.

Two central questions have occupied students of adult socialization, each of them generating interesting lines of research and theorizing. The first directs itself outward, into the social context of personal change: What kinds of changes take place under the impact of different kinds of social structures? To put it in somewhat more interactionist terms, and spell out the process involved a little more fully, what kinds of situations do the socializing institutions place their new recruits in, what kinds of responses and expectations do recruits find in those situations, and to what extent and in what ways are these incorporated into the self? The second question, somewhat less studied, turns our attention inward: What kinds of mechanisms operate to produce the changes we observe in adults? I will take these up in order.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The study of adult socialization began, naturally enough, with studies of people who were participants in institutions deliberately designed to produce changes in adults. The research was often evaluative in character, designed to find out whether these institutions actually produced the changes they were supposed to produce. Had students of professional schools, at the end of their training, developed the appropriate skills and attitudes? Did prisoners lose their antisocial character and become potentially law-abiding citizens? The studies done usually disappointed the administrators of the institutions studied, for they generally revealed that the desired results were not being achieved. This disappointment led to an inquiry into exactly what was going on, in the hope of discovering how these malfunctions could be avoided. Later inquiries were more complex, went beyond asking simply whether or not the institution achieved its purpose, began to raise more interesting questions, and produced some important discoveries.

One discovery was that the processes of change involved were more complicated than changing in a way that was not officially approved. Wheeler discovered, for instance, in a study of criminal attitudes among convicts, that their attitudes became more "antisocial" the longer they were in prison —until the date of their release approached. Then, confronted with the prospect of returning to civilian society, they rapidly shed the criminal orientation that the impact of prison had fostered in them. The curve of "criminalization," rather than being a straight line slanting up, was U-shaped. This indicated that one had to take seriously the obvious possibility

6. Stanton Wheeler, "Socialization in Correctional Communities," *American Sociological Review* 26 (October 1961), 697–712.

gh they have
elf.
dization, each
ing. The first
:hange: What
inds of social
and spell out
ins do the so-
of responses
, what extent
second ques-
vhat kinds of
adults? I will

ith studies of
igned to pro-
in character,
produced the
professional
ate skills and
become po-
ippointed the
revealed that
ient led to an
covering how
iore complex,
. achieved its
oduced some

re more com-
ived. Wheeler
.ong convicts,
vere in prison
ited with the
the criminal
The curve of
up, was U-
ius possibility

American Soci-

that the curve of institutional influence might take any of a number of forms, each to be discovered by research rather than being taken for granted.

A second, and equally obvious, discovery was that to speak of "the institution" as producing change was a vast oversimplification. Institutions do not operate so monolithically. In order to understand the changes that took place one had to look at the structure of the institution in detail—at the particular relationships, both formal and informal, among all the participants, and at the kinds of recurring situations that arose among them. Thus, Stanton and Schwartz were able to show that mental patients responded dramatically to quarrels that took place between staff members of a mental hospital. A staff member might decide, against the opinion of others, that a particular patient would respond to intensive treatment. The staff member's intramural quarrel would lead him to invest vast amounts of time and effort on the patient and thereby produce radical improvement in the patient. But this investment also drove him out on a limb vis-à-vis his colleagues, and when he discovered his precarious situation, he clambered back to safety. The patient then returned to his original condition or, perhaps, to a worse one.[7]

A third discovery, one that could easily have been predicted from early studies in industrial sociology, was that the people the institution was trying to socialize did not respond to its efforts as individuals, but might, given the opportunity, respond as an organized group. Thus, my colleagues and I, when we studied the socializing effects of a medical school, found it necessary to speak of *student culture.*[8] By this term we referred to the meanings and understandings generated in interaction among students, the perspectives they developed and acted on in confronting the problems set for them by the school, its authorities, and curriculum. The importance of this observation is that the school's impact does not strike the individual student, with his own unique feelings and emotions, directly. Rather, it is mediated by the interpretations given him by the culture he participates in, a culture which allows him to discount and circumvent some of the efforts of his teachers.

A fourth discovery was that the world beyond the socializing institution played an important part in the socializing process, affecting the amount of impact it had either positively or negatively. This is apparent in the earlier prison example, where the experience of prison actually produced a change

7. Alfred Stanton and Morris Schwartz, *The Mental Hospital* (New York: Basic Books, 1954), pp. 301–365.
8. Howard S. Becker, Blanche Geer, Everett C. Hughes and Anselm L. Strauss, *Boys in White: Student Culture in Medical School* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

in attitudes in a direction opposite to what was desired, this trend being overcome when the prospect of leaving the prison for the larger world loomed ahead. It was, in fact, only during the period when the influence of the outside world was minimized that prison had an influence. Similarly, Davis and Olesen and their colleagues have shown that the professional training of nurses is deeply marked by the nursing school's inability to shut out external influences, in the form of generalized cultural expectations that the girls will soon marry and never become practicing professionals.[9]

As a consequence of these discoveries and rediscoveries, we can now look at the effects of socializing institutions with something of a model in mind. We know that the changes they produce in the self are likely to be complicated and many-faceted, the course in every case needing to be traced out empirically rather than assumed; we know that we must have detailed knowledge of the pattern of social relations within the socializing organization, as these impinge on the person being changed; we understand that we must see the process of socialization as at least potentially a collective experience, undergone by a group acting in and interpreting their world together, rather than as individuals; and we realize that we cannot ignore the influence of extraorganizational social groups. This gives us a framework for organizing research and a set of central concerns, each of which can be elaborated in specialized investigations.

As an example of the kind of elaboration possible, consider the question of the culture that grows up among those being socialized. (I give as an example student culture, but it is important to realize that we may similarly have convict culture, patient culture, or a culture of any group confronted with the problem of having attempts made to influence their selves.) Such a culture may or may not develop, depending on the conditions of interaction among those being socialized. In the extreme case, if people cannot communicate they cannot develop a culture (though studies of prisons have shown that people are remarkably ingenious in devising methods of communication in unpromising circumstances). Less extremely, the kind of communication possible and the paths along which it can move will determine the degree and kind of culture that arise.[10]

This leads to analysis of how socializing institutions handle their recruits, as these affect communication possibilities. Wheeler has suggested two dimensions of prime analytic importance. An institution may take recruits in cohorts, as most schools do when they admit a freshman class each fall, or it may take them in individually, as prisons and hospitals

9. Fred Davis and Virginia L. Olesen, "Initiation into a Women's Profession." *Sociometry* 26 (March 1963), 89–101.

10. Howard S. Becker and Blanche Geer, "Latent Culture: A Note on the Theory of Latent Social Roles," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 5 (September 1960), 304–313.

usually do. In the first instance, the recruits will face similar problems simultaneously, which maximizes the need for communication. In the second, each person will face his own problems alone: his fellows will either already have dealt with it and thus no longer be interested or will not be there yet and thus have no awareness of the problem, both tending to make communication more difficult.

The second dimension suggested by Wheeler distinguishes disjunctive from serial forms of socialization. In the first, one cohort or individual is released from the institution before another enters, so that communication is possible only outside the institution's walls; thus, delinquents might tell one another about the juvenile home before they enter it. In the second, several cohorts or individuals are present simultaneously, allowing the culture to be passed on rather than being developed anew, as happens when various perspectives on college life are passed on from one class to the next. Wheeler's analysis explores the consequences for the self of the various combinations of these dimensions that can arise.[11]

Let me conclude our exploration of the effects of social structure by making the essential jump from the socializing institution, which may be taken as an extreme case, to social organizations generally, any of which can be analyzed as though it, in effect, were attempting to socialize its participants. That is, any social organization, of whatever size or complexity, has effects on the selves of those who are involved in its workings. By taking these effects as the object of our attention and viewing every organization, whatever its stated intentions, as a socializing organiaztion, we can see how society is perpetually engaged in changing the selves of its members. For every part of society constantly confronts people with new situations and unexpected contingencies, with new others whose role they must take, with new demands and responses to be incorporated into the generalized other. The self, as I remarked earlier, is constantly changing and, in this sense, the label "adult socialization" is a misnomer, suggesting as it does that the process occurs only occasionally and then only in special places.

Take the processes involved in the use of addictive and intoxicating drugs as an example. Throughout the history of any individual's experience with such drugs, society will confront him with situations that produce appreciable changes in the self. His initial willingness to experiment with drugs that are legally and morally forbidden comes about, typically, after he has begun to participate in circles where drugs are regarded as morally appropriate, as much less dangerous than popularly believed, and as productive of desirable kinds of experience.

When the person first takes any drug, the subjective experience he has will itself be a consequence of the anticipated responses he has learned to

11. Brim and Wheeler, *op. cit.*

expect as a result of his interaction with more experienced users, responses he has incorporated into his self. For example, the novice marihuana user usually experiences nothing at all when he first uses the drug. It is only when other users have pointed out to him subtle variations in how he feels, in how things look and sound to him, that he is willing to credit the drug with having had any effect on him at all.[12] Similarly, Lindesmith has shown that people can be habituated to opiate drugs without becoming addicted, so long as no one points out to them the connection between the withdrawal distress they feel and the actual cessation of drug use. It is only when the withdrawal symptoms are interpreted as indicating a need for another shot, an interpretation often furnished by other users, and the shot taken with the predicted relief following, that the process of addiction is set in motion.[13] When a drug-using culture exists, this process operates smoothly. When it does not, as appears to be presently true with respect to LSD-25, people are likely to have a great variety of symptoms, especially anxiety reactions, triggered by their surprise at unexpected effects (because they have not been forecast by participants in such a culture), which may lead to diagnoses of drug-induced psychosis.[14] Finally, drastic changes in the self may occur as changes in the user's social relations, incident to his drug use, take place. On the one hand, his use may involve him more and more deeply (though it will not necessarily do so) in participation with other users and deviants, whose responses, growing out of a shared culture, will lead him to see himself as one of them and to act more like them and less like any of the other social beings he might be. (This process seems most marked among opiate users, as it is among some homosexuals, and much less marked with users of marihuana.) On the other hand, the use of drugs may bring the person to the attention of authorities (mainly the police) who will brand him as deviant and treat him accordingly, thus inducing a conception of himself as the victim of uninformed outsiders. In either case, he is likely to come out of the process a more confirmed deviant than he entered. (Such processes, of course, do not always run the full course: we particularly need studies of the contingencies of social structure and interaction that lead away from the formation of deviant selves.)[15]

To repeat, this extended example serves simply as an instance of the utility of regarding all of society as a socializing mechanism which operates

12. Howard S. Becker, "Becoming a Marihuana User," *American Journal of Sociology* LIX (November 1953), pp. 235–242.
13. Alfred R. Lindesmith, *Addiction and Opiates* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1968).
14. Howard S. Becker, "History, Culture and Subjective Experience: An Exploration of the Social Bases of Drug-Induced Experiences," in this volume.
15. See the discussion in Howard S. Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: The Free Press, 1963), pp. 25–39.

rs, responses
rihuana user
ig. It is only
how he feels.
edit the drug
desmith has
ut becoming
between the
se. It is only
need for an-
and the shot
f addiction is
cess operates
with respect
ms, especially
fects (because
), which may
ic changes in
ncident to his
im more and
cipation with
hared culture,
like them and
process seems
osexuals, and
hand, the use
s (mainly the
ordingly, thus
outsiders. In
firmed deviant
run the full
ocial structure
selves.)[15]

istance of the
which operates

Journal of Soci-

Publishing Co.,

e: An Explora-

the Sociology of

throughout a person's life, creating changes in his self and his behavior. We can just as well view families, occupations, work places, and neighborhoods in this fashion as we can deviant groups and legal authorities. All studies of social organizations of any kind are thus simultaneously studies of adult socialization.

MECHANISMS OF CHANGE

The second major area of research and theorizing in the study of adult socialization, less thoroughly explored than that of social structure, consists of the mechanisms by which participation in social organizations produces change. To introduce the topic, let me first mention that, in the view I have been presenting, stability in the self is taken to be just as problematic as change, so that we shall be looking at mechanisms that operate in both directions.

The general explanations of both stability and change in the self have been hinted at already in the discussion of interactionist theory and require only a slight elaboration. The person, as he participates in social interaction, constantly takes the roles of others, viewing what he does and is about to do from their viewpoint, imputing to his own actions the meaning he anticipates others will impute to them, and appraising the worth of the course on which he has embarked on accordingly. One important implication of this view is that people are not free to act as their inner dispositions (however we may conceptualize them) dictate. Instead, they act as they are constrained to by the actions of their coparticipants. To cite an obvious example, we use grammatical forms and words in accord with how others will understand them, knowing that if we become inventive and make up our own we will not be understood. The example indicates the limits of the proposition: It applies only when the actor wishes to continue interaction and have what he does be intelligible to others, or when he wishes to deceive them in some predictable way. But most social behavior meets this criterion and we need not concern ourselves with those rare instances in which communication is not desired.

The overall mechanism of change in the self, therefore, consists of the continual changes that occur in the person's notions of how others are likely to respond to his actions and the meanings he imputes to his own actions by virtue of the imputations others have made earlier. In his effort to continue interaction, to communicate, the person is continually confronted with his own wrong guesses on this score and thus with the need to revise the roles of others he has incorporated into his self.

This points the way to one specific mechanism of change, which has been called situational adjustment.[16] As the person moves into a new situation,

16. Howard S. Becker, "Personal Change in Adult Life," in this volume.

he discovers that, just because it is new, it contains some unexpected contingencies. Everything does not work out as he expects. People respond to him in unanticipated ways, leading him to appraise what he is doing afresh. He gradually discovers "how things are done here," incorporates these new anticipations of the responses of others into his self and thus adjusts to the situation. He can then continue to act without further change in the self until he is precipitated into a new situation or until the situaion changes beneath his feet.

The convicts studied by Wheeler provide an interesting example of this process. When they first enter prison they are ready to believe that crime does not pay. If it did, would they be there? But they enter an organization which is actually run by other prisoners. While prison administrators make rules and set policy, while guards attempt to enforce those rules and policies, the details of daily life come largely under the surveillance and control of the convicts' shadow government, to which prison officials largely abandon these tasks in return for peace and quiet in the institution. Convict culture is dominated by criminal values, by beliefs such as that crime does pay and that one should never snitch on a fellow inmate. To get along with the other prisoners, to play any meaningful part in what goes on and thus influence the conditions of one's own life, it is necessary to act in ways that are congruent with these beliefs and perspectives. Therefore, the longer one is in prison, the more "criminal" one's perspective.

By the same token, when one is about to leave the prison, it suddenly becomes clear that the world outside is, after all, not the prison and that it does not operate with the criminal perspectives that make collective action possible inside prison walls. The convict realizes that what works inside will probably not work outside, that his adjustment to prison ways will not enable him to interact easily with the people he will meet once he is out. In anticipation of the change in situation, he begins once again to adjust his self, changing it to incorporate the new responses of others he anticipates.[17] (Wheeler did not study what happened to inmates once released. It may well be that the repsonses of other people include some the prisoners did not anticipate, so that they begin to move once more toward a criminal perspective.)

Situational adjustment is not very complicated, as explanatory mechanisms go. But it seems to explain a great deal of what can be observed of change and stability in the self. The self changes when situations change and remains relatively stable when they do not. Some aspects of the self, however, display great stability over a variety of situational pressures and this easily observable fact points to the need for other explanatory mecha-

17. Wheeler, *op. cit.*

ected con-
respond to
ing afresh.
these new
justs to the
in the self
n changes

ple of this
that crime
organization
ators make
nd policies,
i control of
ly abandon
vict culture
e does pay
ng with the
ind thus in-
n ways that
: longer one

it suddenly
a and that it
:ctive action
vorks inside
rays will not
:e he is out.
iin to adjust
rs he antici-
released. It
he prisoners
d a criminal

atory mech-
observed of
tions change
i of the self,
ressures and
itory mecha-

nisms. One which is congruent with the position taken here is the mechanism of commitment.[18]

A person is committed whenever he realizes that it will cost him more to change his line of behavior than it will to continue to act in a way that is consistent with his past actions, and that this state of affairs has come about through some prior action of his own. So committed, he will resist pressures to adjust to new situations that push him in a contrary direction, perhaps moving out of those situations where that is possible or else attempting to change the situation so that he can continue in the direction of his commitment.

A simple example of commitment is a man who is offered a new job but, on calculating its advantages and disadvantages, decides that the cost of taking the new job—in loss of seniority and pension rights, in having to learn a new set of ropes, and so on—makes it prohibitive. The trick in understanding commitment is to grasp the full range of things that have sufficient value to be included in the calculation. In analyzing occupational commitments, Geer[19] has suggested the following as the minimal list of valuables by which people can be committed: specialized training, which can only be used in the particular occupation; generalized social prestige, which would be lost if one left the occupation; loss of face following an exhibition of being unable to continue at one's chosen work; perquisites of the job to which one has become accustomed; rewarding personal involvements with clients or coworkers; promotional opportunities and other career possibilities; successful situational adjustment to one's present way of doing things; and prestige among colleagues. We can discover how people are committed only by finding out from them which things have sufficient value for their loss to constitute a constraint.

The list above of committing valuables indicates clearly the importance of social structure for the commitment process. Commitment can only occur when there are things present in the environment which are valuable enough that their loss constitutes a real loss. But objects acquire that kind of value only through the operation of a social organization, which both embodies the consensus that ascribes major value to them and creates the structural conditions under which they achieve the necessary attribute of scarcity. If you can get a certain valuable anywhere and with great ease, it is no longer very valuable; but if the social structure makes it scarce, allowing it to be gained in only a few ways that are structurally guarded, it takes on greater value.

18. The concept is explored at greater length in Howard S. Becker, "Notes on the Concept of Commitment," in this volume.

19. Blanche Geer, "Occupational Commitment and the Teaching Profession," *The School Review* 74 (Spring 1966), pp. 31–47.

Commitment and situational adjustment are clearly of great importance, and each is congruent with a symbolic interactionist approach to the self and adult socialization. Other mechanisms have yet to be discovered and explored. We might speculate, for instance, that involvement will be another such mechanism. People sometimes create a new and at least temporarily stable self by becoming deeply engrossed in a particular activity or group of people, becoming involved in the sense that they no longer take into account the responses of a large number of people with whom they actually interact.

Just as in the case of commitment, one of the crucial questions in the analysis of involvements is how organizations are constructed so as to allow the mechanism to come into play. What kinds of special arrangements allow a person to become so involved in an object, activity, or group that he becomes insensitive to the expectations of others to whom we might equally, on the basis of propinquity and frequency of interaction, expect him to be responsive? Selznick's analysis of the "fanaticism" of grass roots recruits to the TVA suggests the direction such analyses might take.[20] Their fanaticism consisted in always acting with the interests of their local community, and especially its businessmen, in mind, and systematically ignoring the considerations of national interest and bureaucratic constraint put forward by national TVA officials, both in Washington and in the field. They were able to maintain such a consistently one-sided perspective, which caused other agency officials to label them "fanatics," because all of their personal interests were bound up in the local community to which they knew they would return. They had no career or other interests in the national agency, so that the arguments and pleas of other officials (which took for granted that everyone had motives like theirs, actually unique to those who did have long term interests in the agency) meant nothing to them.

Generalizing from this case, we can look for the mechanism of involvement to operate whenever people are insulated from the opinions of others who, on the basis of common sense, we would expect to exert influence on them. Those others may be family members, as when an adolescent becomes so involved with his peers that he loses interest in what his parents think about his activities. They may be work associates, as in the TVA case. They may be such community representatives as the police, as when we speak of drug addicts being obsessed or totally involved in the activities surrounding drug use. Or we may have in mind some generalized conception of "public opinion," as when we wonder how people can do things that "everyone knows" are bizarre or unusual, such as being a nudist.

20. Philip Selznick, *TVA and the Grass Roots* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953), pp. 210–213.

mportance,
to the self
overed and
will be an-
least tem-
lar activity
no longer
with whom

tions in the
as to allow
rrangements
group that
n we might
tion, expect
grass roots
ake.²⁰ Their
r local com-
ically ignor-
onstraint put
in the field.
perspective,
because all
ity to which
erests in the
icials (which
ly unique to
t nothing to

n of involve-
ons of others
influence on
lolescent be-
t his parents
in the TVA
lice, as when
the activities
lized concep-
an do things
i nudist.

y of California

The structural conditions that produce such involvements consist of so-cial arrangements which effectively isolate people from other opinion, which allow them to ignore the expectations of some of those with whom they interact. Physical isolation is the most obvious example: religious sects often attempt to move away from the rest of society, as the Mormons once did, thus protecting their members from the necessity of shaping their be-havior in the light of the scandalized responses of others. People may also be isolated, as the grass roots fanatics in TVA were, in an organizational sense; though they interact with others, their organizational positions and interests are so different as to preclude the development of any sense of community or common fate. More subtly, a person may be taught by the members of a group he has joined how to discount the opinions of those he once took seriously. Drug users learn to do this, and so do young people who enter an occupation their parents disapprove. Or, to conclude this pre-liminary and incomplete catalogue, they may have an experience com-monly defined in one way or another, as setting them apart from others: a serious illness, a religious conversion, an emotional trauma. In every case, the crucial fact is that the person's social relationships—whom he comes into contact with and what they expect of him—become patterned in a way that allows him to dismiss certain categories of people from the self process.

I have briefly indicated the nature of a few mechanisms of change in the self: situational adjustment, through which much of the day-to-day varia-tion in behavior can be explained; commitment, through which the devel-opment of long-term interests arises; and involvement, a process of shutting out of potential influences. Much work, empirical and theoretical, remains to be done.

Conclusion

Work in the field of adult socialization has made several contributions to the study of personality. It is one of the developments that is helping to turn the theory of symbolic interaction, by filling it out with research and the differentiated network of propositions research brings with its findings, from a programmatic scheme into a usable scientific tool. By doing this, it also begins to make available to students of personality, by providing the necessary concepts, much of the rich body of data sociologists have accumu-lated. It has, finally, introduced all of us to some areas of society that had not heretofore been studied and in so doing enriched our understanding both of society and of the great variety of influences which play on the con-tinual development of the self.