



Needed: New Means of Socialization

James C. Coleman

Society must create—in connection with schools or apart from them—new ways to help young people learn about “becoming adult.”

Throughout history, most socialization was done outside the formal institution of the school. Most was done by the family, but other institutions have been important as well: youth groups, such as church groups, boys' and girls' clubs, Scouts, 4-H Clubs, and others; informal neighborhood ties, not only with other young people, but with adults outside the family; and task-oriented settings, where young people engaged in some kind of work or other duties.

Once we recognize this, it becomes important to see how much the socializing environment has changed for youth. School, with its special and rather narrow socializing tasks, has come to absorb an increasing portion of the time of youth.

Meanwhile the time outside of school has become increasingly bereft of the traditional socializing agencies. Personal relationships with adults outside the family are conspicuously absent from the experience of many young people. The foundation of voluntary associations on which youth groups were built is weaker, and fewer youth are involved. The family itself is shorn of many of its functions and is increasingly crippled by divorce.

Other experiences, especially commercial entertainment such as television and popular music, now hold a prominent place in the environment of the young. But these new influences are hardly functional substitutes for the earlier ones. We need to ask what socialization tasks are now un-

performed for large numbers of the young, and what might be done about it.

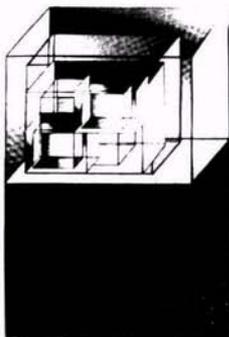
We can identify missing socialization tasks by reflecting on what used to be done by the institutions we have said are vanishing. These tasks include learning to take responsibility for others, learning to work interdependently with others, learning to lead and to follow, learning how to make decisions and take action when necessary, and a host of other things that are ordinarily summed up in the words, "becoming adult." An adult-sponsored youth group is far better suited to developing these tasks than is the typical school, although alternative schools and experiential education often include them as aims.

As we think about what might be done, the first point to recognize is that society can no longer depend on voluntary institutions and charitable enterprises to accomplish the task. For example, although there are now more young unmarried adults than in recent history, there are shortages of volunteer adult leaders for youth groups. The responsibility is a societal one, which should be recognized collectively. The solution consists of creating, in connection with schools or apart from them, institutions that serve some of these functions. There is probably no single prototype form that can serve all goals, but we do have examples of environmental settings that contribute to some of them: various kinds of youth social groups, youth work groups such as the Youth Conservation Corps, Outward Bound, volunteer service as hospital aides, and so on. It is not that we lack knowledge of how the young can be provided with a richer environment for socialization. The problem is that too many people fail to recognize that the old institutions are no longer sufficient; that they must be supplemented with new ones.



James C. Coleman is Professor of Sociology, University of Chicago, Chicago.

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