

Inveterate Ironies of Socialization

Emily Hoffhines

One of the inveterate ironies in the life of a home educator is that the question, "What about socialization?" exposes the flawed social skill of the enquirer. This is most often asked by a person who has only recently met you. The question presumes that socialization could be troublesome. Because it carries an intrinsic mistrust in your ability to recognize and deal with socialization issues, the question can rankle your defenses if you are not prepared for it.

Bless their hearts, most people who ask, "What about socialization?" are quite clueless that they have just made a faux pas. A well-socialized person would never cause a new acquaintance to feel defensive on purpose. But even if they are oblivious to how they sound to a homeschooler, they have tuned-in to the collective belief that socialization is a problem for many people.

A few years ago I had the opportunity to be involved in a county-wide youth rally. During registration we asked the teens to fill out a short informal questionnaire about what they felt was the greatest problem they faced. No one was troubled by foreign verb conjugation or irrational coefficients of imaginary numbers. No one was worried about their carbon footprint or the spikes in the prime lending rate. The top three answers were drugs, sex, and peer pressure—all of which are rooted in negative socialization.

Public schools are truly a "house divided" when it comes to socialization. In policy statements, they are against illegal drug use and promiscuity; yet they provide the climate that fosters these very behaviors. School is the place to be popular and fit in. Acceptance is aggressively competitive and the most highly admired qualities are often materialistically driven.

So, what about socialization? How did it start? And what are some of the biblical principles we have for guidance?

It started rather badly. History books are filled with examples of disastrous socialization. In the earliest biblical account, we find Adam and Eve chatting with a soon-to-be notorious serpent. The next thing we know, they heard God walking around and decided to go hide. In their case, you could make the argument that they hadn't had much opportunity to gain practice in social situations. But nine generations later, Noah found himself bobbing along on top of a flood after the socialization experience had gotten out of hand.

Socialization under Nimrod gives us a snapshot of one possible outcome for the socialization mantra, "Can't we all just get a long?" The unity and teamwork used to build the Tower of Babel were extraordinary, but sorely misdirected. In the end, the LORD scattered the construction crew abroad over the face of the whole earth.

A lot of what passes for *good socialization* today has seeds of the same error. They had said *let us build for ourselves a city, and let us make for ourselves a name*. Self-confidence and pride of workmanship have their place, but how close has today's doctrine of socialization come to

emulating the builders of Babel? This was a highly socialized society, but the focus was on self-improvement, not on mentoring a servant's heart.

When we do find successful socialization in the Old Testament, it often comes structured as generational continuity. Perhaps it is because America began as a nation of immigrants whose familial ties were severed by a voyage across an ocean; perhaps it is the product of the industrial revolution followed by the rapid progression of technology; perhaps it's a combination; but in any event, family time is not what it used to be.

Clearly, city-size groups are not always the best forum for acquiring social skills. Again and again the Old Testament patterns of socialization reside in families. We learn in Genesis 18:19 that Abraham was chosen because God could trust him to be a family counselor. Moses, who was raised by Pharaoh's daughter, had his sister, brother, and father-in-law for social resources during the wilderness years. Queen Esther, with the Persian court before her, found her best *social networking* with her cousin, Mordechai.

In the e-Book, *Turning Points*, Donna Wood tells of the time her son remarked that he loves Saturdays. Expecting an answer along the line of getting to sleep in or being able to watch television, she asked him, "Why?" But instead of focusing on any special privilege he shrugged and said, "I feel like part of the family on Saturdays." Her son had seen the socialization offered at the local Christian school and had decided that Saturday with the family was better.

But sometimes, even families are too big for learning good socialization. In a maneuver that defies the common logic, there are times when the best socialization takes place alone. The Gospels offer many examples of Jesus going off by himself. I believe his humanity had to connect with who He really was/is. A properly socialized person will need time for reflection, and time to learn to think for himself.

Without first becoming grounded in who you are, who your Creator is, and in knowing what your purpose for the day is, socialization can become a buffeting wind that sends you even farther adrift.

Biographical Information

Copyright, 2009. All rights reserved by author below. Content provided by [The Old Schoolhouse® Magazine, LLC](#).

Emily Hoffhines has homeschooled three children from babyhood to adult. She currently is a certified tutor at Huntington Learning Center, and enjoys writing, editing, and woodland gardening.