



# 3

## Being Social

### CHAPTER SUMMARY

What does it mean to be human and how do we become what we become? This chapter covers a topic that is usually at the heart of the classic “nature versus nurture” debate in the disciplines of sociology and psychology. Is human behaviour learned or is it biologically determined? We know it is a lifelong, dynamic process but what forces shape how we function within a society? One area of study that has risen in both disciplines is the field of social psychology, which uses aspects of both sociology and psychology to try to understand this debate to a better extent.

The chapter introduces you to the early psychological theories of Sigmund Freud, Erik Erikson, Jean Piaget, and Lawrence Kohlberg’s development of Piaget’s work. The former focused on the psychological, while the latter three added a social component into their theories to explain how we learn.

Shifting to a symbolic interactionist frame, we find the major influence in socialization on the nurture side of the debate. The two more well-known theorists from this school of thought are George Herbert Mead and Charles Horton Cooley. For Mead, it is the social, not biological, factors that are the driving source for human behaviours. Mead argues that the self is initially unsocialized—the “I.” But through interaction with ours, we become socialized. This socialized being is the “Me.” For Cooley, it is a similar process. He uses the concept of a “looking glass self.” This means that we base our actions on how we interpret others’ perceptions of us.

Functionalist and conflict perspectives focus on understanding how the role and activity is of more importance to socialization than simply the process itself. The functionalist perspective addresses how the status quo and conformity helps to preserve the basic needs and structure for society to survive,

while the conflict perspective focuses on how the rich and powerful establish their ideologies and are passed on through generations by social channelling. Feminist theories on socialization critique the functionalist perspective and often focus on how social interaction constructs gender-role socialization that mirrors and perpetuates inequalities throughout the society.

Lastly, this chapter identifies and differentiates between the agents of socialization: primary and secondary. These consist of, but are by no means limited to, our families, peer groups, schools, and the mass media. The last part of the chapter addresses the aspect of resocialization. The term can be used in two senses: one to address the aging population and another to refer to those who are incarcerated in total institutions. The chapter ends with the question of whether or not socialization is a force of structure over which we have no control, or if we are free agents to chart our own paths. (Refer back to earlier chapters if you don't recall structure and agency.)

## KEY TERMS

Anticipatory socialization  
Gender-role socialization  
Generalized other  
Primary agent of socialization

Reciprocal socialization  
Resocialization  
Secondary socialization  
Significant others

Socialization  
Total institutions

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What are three differences between family life today in Canada and family life in Canada 100 years ago? (p. 66)
2. According to Piaget, what are the four major cumulative stages of intellectual development? (p. 63)
3. What is a total institution? Provide an example. (p. 76)
4. What is the difference between primary and secondary socialization? (p. 66)
5. What is the nature versus nurture debate? (p. 61)
6. What are the four basic assumptions made by the symbolic interactionist frame of reference? (p. 64)
7. According to Mead, what are the three stages in developing a full sense of selfhood? (pp. 64–65)
8. How might socialization help support ideologies and practices that work to the advantage of dominant groups? (p. 65)
9. Why would older adults need to be resocialized? (p. 75)
10. What are the four stages of development outlined by Piaget? (p. 63)

## READINGS AND WEBSITES

**Handel, Gerald, Spencer Cahill, and Frederick Elkin (2007).** *Children and Society: The sociology of children and childhood socialization*. New York: Oxford University Press.

*Children and Society* looks at how children are socialized into the world. You may find this book of particular interest because you can most likely draw from several of your own childhood experiences in relation to the issues being addressed. The first part of this book looks at the social construction of children, the foundations of socialization, and the cultural and historical construction of childhood. The next part goes into depth about the agencies of socialization: family, peer groups, schools, and the media. The last section addresses factors such as class, race and ethnicity, and sex and gender.

**Kramer, Michael (2010).** *Organizational Socialization*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

For most people after high school/college/university, one of their goals is to get a job. The very job we choose has unique rules and standards to which we must become accustomed. This brings forth another form of socialization. Kramer's book looks at the process from beginning to end. The book starts with the individual entering the workforce/organization. We are quickly socialized and assimilated to work with those around us. At the same time, we are subjected to occupational and role anticipatory socialization. The next section looks at how the culture of the organizations affects our subsequent relationships with our colleagues and transitions into this new area. Lastly, the author addresses what happens during our organizational exit at the end of our careers (retirement).

**Garmon, Linda (Writer and Director). (18 October 1994).** *Nova: Secret of the Wild Child* [Television Series]. In Linda Garmon, Boston, Massachusetts: Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). Retrieved from <http://www.teachertube.com/video/secrets-of-the-wild-child-1-223041>

Originally produced as an episode in the *Nova* TV Series in 2003, this PBS Documentary presents the unique case of Genie, who was abused as a child and raised in complete isolation. This case study raises many questions about the nature vs. nurture debate.

**Priesnitz, Wendy. (2016).** *Life Learning: Canadian Home-Based Learning Resources*. [Website]. Retrieved from <http://www.life.ca/lifelearningca/>

Provides information and resources on topics such as unschooling, self-learning, and socialization. The website presents an argument for homeschooling and its benefits.

**MediaSmarts. (2017).** [Website]. Retrieved from <http://mediasmarts.ca/>

MediaSmarts is a Canadian not-for-profit charitable organization for digital and media literacy. Their goal is that children and youth have the critical thinking skills to engage with media as active and informed digital citizens.