

# Chapter 4: Resocialization

## During COVID-19

During the pandemic, we all underwent processes of resocialization. We had to unlearn certain behaviours, values, and attitudes—and learn others. Government institutions, working in concert with larger national and worldwide health organizations like the WHO, acted as a key agent of our resocialization. At the beginning of the pandemic in Canada, for example, government messaging focused on a [few key actions](#): stay home if you're feeling ill; wash your hands with soap and water; practice social distancing; clean and disinfect surfaces and objects; and limit non-essential travel.

It is hard to quantify, but it is clear that the overwhelming majority of people voluntarily obeyed the instructions they were given by federal, provincial, and local governments and health experts. However, it was up to us individually to interpret the advice we received in the context of our own lives. In this “new reality,” actions we believed to be polite, even ethical—holding doors for others, using public transportation and reusable coffee cups, shaking hands, caring for friends when they're sick—were refigured as risky and dangerous. We had to, collectively and individually, find new ways of communicating, socializing, working, caring for each other, and celebrating. How should you greet a loved one from a distance? When crossing the road to maintain social distance, should you smile to acknowledge our collective awkwardness? How do you create a sense of celebration during an online graduation ceremony? What does it mean to date online? How do you ensure your young children don't miss key steps in their primary socialization?

As the first wave of the pandemic abated in Canada, one overwhelming criticism leveled at governments and medical experts was their failure to emphasize the importance of mask-wearing as a response to COVID-19. We now know that it is an effective tactic; however, because it was not emphasized (in some cases, it was even de-emphasized) in the early stages of the pandemic, the broader population was not “socialized” to wearing masks in public spaces. This led to a concerted effort to socialize people to mask usage.

It will be a long time until we know how this process of resocialization ends and what its long-term effects will be, even after a vaccine or effective treatment is found.



*Illustration by Daniel Barreto on Unsplash*

## As you read the chapter, consider the following questions:

- What other agents of socialization played a role in your resocialization during the pandemic? Were there contested moments when two things you learned conflicted? How did you sort through that situation?
- Why do you think initial mixed-messaging so negatively affected mask-wearing compliance? What tactics might you use to socialize mask-wearing among the general public?
- Countries with narrow socialization imposed strict rules and sanctions to mitigate the effects of the virus. Other countries, those with broad socialization, tended to ask for voluntary adherence to the advice of medical professionals. Where do you think Canada falls on this spectrum? Do you think broad or narrow socialization is best to deal with a crisis like a pandemic? What might be the downsides to each?
- How we were socialized affected how we reacted to the pandemic. This was true at a macro level: people in different countries reacted differently on the whole. And on a personal level, you likely had different responses even from your friends and family. What determined your personal reaction? Consider factors that would be highlighted by a biological determinist, a behaviourist, and a Freudian.



## Additional online resources

This radio clip proposes some causes of resistance to mask-wearing in Canada.

- CBC Radio. (2020, July 3). [How psychology can explain pushback against mandatory masks](#).

This article theorizes why countries have different views on mask-wearing.

- Friedman, U. (2020, April 2). [Face masks are in](#). The Atlantic.

What new behaviours that we've adopted during the pandemic might stick around after it's over?

- Poon, L. (2020, May 26). [What our post-pandemic behavior might look like](#). Bloomberg City Lab.

Vietnam is an authoritarian state. How might narrow socialization have contributed to its success in handling the pandemic?

- Sullivan, M. (2020, April 16). [In Vietnam, there have been fewer than 300 COVID-19 cases and no deaths. Here's why](#). NPR.

Many of us used the trick of singing a song while washing our hands to ensure we were washing for the recommended 20 seconds (examples [here](#)). Can you think of a similar tactic to encourage mask-wearing?

- Zafar, A. (2020, July 3). [How to make COVID-19 mask-wearing a habit: Social scientists offer some suggestions](#). CBC News.