



Socialization

4

Learning Objectives

After reading chapter 4, you will be able to

- distinguish between primary and secondary socialization.
- contrast biological and social/cultural determinism.
- explain the relevance of Sigmund Freud's ideas to the sociological study of socialization.
- distinguish between the three different parts of the mind as defined by Freud.
- explain Mead's and Cooley's theories of the development of the self.
- discuss the role of agency in the context of socialization.
- describe different agents of socialization, provide examples, and link them to primary and secondary socialization.
- illustrate the difference between voluntary and involuntary socialization using examples.

Chapter Summary

Socialization is a lifelong learning process through which an individual develops a sense of self and learns how to be a member of a given society. **Primary socialization** typically occurs during childhood, while **secondary socialization** occurs later and throughout life.

Discussions of socialization must address how much of what we do is shaped by biological or social factors, and the role of free will. **Determinism** is the belief that an individual's behaviour, values, and other personal characteristics are caused by a specific factor, while free will refers to **agency**, or the capacity to influence what happens in our lives.

We distinguish between two types of determinism, also referred to as the "nature versus nurture" debate. Representing the "nature" side of the debate is biological determinism, which states that the greater part of who we are is determined by our approximately 26,000 genes. On the "nurture" side of the debate we find social or cultural determinism, particularly **behaviourism**, which emphasizes that human behaviour is not biologically determined, but taught and learned through behaviour

modification. Edward Thorndike called this process **law of effect**. Desired behaviours are rewarded and thus reinforced while undesired behaviours are ignored or punished and thus likely abandoned.

The sociological study of socialization at times draws on the work of psychologists, such as Sigmund Freud. Freud's theory of socialization balanced the biological and social aspects of human personality. The **ID** represents our biological impulses (nature), while the **Superego** internalized societal norms through socialization (nurture). The **Ego** is the mediator between our biological impulses and societal norms.

Canadian sociologist Dennis Wrong critiqued behaviourist approaches, arguing that individuals do not passively absorb socializing messages, but rather have the agency (free will) to resist and reject socializing messages. In this view, people do not automatically conform to the lessons of socialization but are free to (re)interpret, reshape, and resist them.

Two theorists, George Herbert Mead and Charles Cooley, developed sociological explanations of the development of self. George Herbert Mead, a symbolic interactionist, argued that children internalize norms and values through socialization by **significant others** (parents, siblings, friends) and **generalized others** (the larger culture). Mead argued that the socialization of a child unfolds as a developmental sequence in three stages. During the **preparatory stage**, children learn to imitate significant others. During the **play stage**, children engage in role-taking and assume the perspective of significant others. Finally, during the **game stage**, children consider simultaneously the perspective of several roles and learns to assume the perspective of the generalized other. Charles Horton Cooley, another symbolic interactionist, argued the self develops through what he called the **looking-glass self**. He explained that the individual's self-image is based on how a person thinks they are viewed by others, which includes:

- How you imagine you appear to others;
- How you imagine those others judge your appearance; and,
- How you feel as a result (proud, ashamed, etc.).

The process of socialization is facilitated by different **agents of socialization**. These socializing agents are groups that have a significant impact on an individual's socialization. The **family**, for example, is the first and most powerful socializing agent. The **peer group**, defined as a social group that shares key social characteristics such as age, social position, and interests, often socializes through **peer pressure**. The **education** system is another powerful socializing agent and is often the first source of information that children receive about social groups other than their own. Finally, **mass media** are key socializing agents, but their effects on individual behaviours is contested.

Resocialization is another aspect of the socialization process. It occurs when an individual transitions into a new social environment. This process involves learning, and also unlearning, behaviours, beliefs, and values. It can be either voluntary (e.g., undergoing a religious conversion) marked by a **rite of passage** (e.g., a confirmation) or involuntary (e.g., entering prison). Involuntary resocialization usually occurs within what Erving Goffman called **total institutions**, where **degradation ceremonies** strip a person of their individuality.

Study Questions

1. Define *socialization* and distinguish between primary and secondary socialization. Provide one example for each.
2. Differentiate between biological determinism and behaviourism. Name one theorist associated with each.
3. How did Freud integrate biological and social elements in his theory of socialization?
4. Briefly describe the five most significant agents of socialization discussed in your textbook and make reference to their roles in the socialization process. Use one example for each from your own life in your response.
5. How might the concept of agency interact with the socialization process?
6. How is resocialization different from primary/secondary socialization? Define and provide examples of voluntary and involuntary resocialization.
7. Compare and contrast the viewpoints of L. Rowell Huesmann with those of Jib Fowles as they relate to media socialization and violence on television.

Exploration and Discussion Exercises

1. Socialization is often depicted in film. Answer the questions below after watching one of the following films: *Pleasantville*, *Blast from the Past*, *Monster*.
 - a) How do the characters in the film depict what you've learned from this chapter?
 - b) What are the most significant agents of socialization in the film?
 - c) Finally, examine the process of resocialization in the film, as well as its outcomes and consequences.
2. In the Telling It Like It Is box on page 112, Australian artist Sonia Singh modified dolls to make them more realistic. Which roles do toys play in the context of gender socialization? To back up your answer, do your own research. If possible, go to a toy store and look throughout the store. Pick one or two contemporary toys and discuss whether they are marketed along gender lines.

Further Readings

Beauregard, N., A. Demers and L. Gliksman (2012). The ecology of college drinking: Revisiting the role of the campus environment on students' drinking patterns. In L. Tepperman and A. Kalyta (Eds.) *Reading Sociology: Canadian Perspectives* (pp. 54–60). Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press.

On secondary socialization in the context of education

Leeuw, S.D. (2007). Intimate colonialisms: The material and experienced places of British Columbia's residential schools. *The Canadian Geographer* 51(3): 339–359.

On the role of the education system in the socialization process

Theberge, N. (1997). “It’s part of the game”: Physicality and the production of gender in women’s hockey. *Gender & Society* 11(1): 69–87.

On secondary socialization in the context of sports

Helpful Websites

Theories of Socialization: <https://www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/socialization-4/theories-of-socialization-44/theories-of-socialization-273-10450/>

A more extensive discussion of forms of socialization and theoretical approaches

The Price of Hurrying Children: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/digital-children/200806/the-price-hurrying-children>

David Elkind, author of *The Hurried Child*, talks about the price of hurrying a child

Indigenous Foundations: <http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/home.html>

Indigenous Foundations provides extensive resources on topics such as Indigenous identity and culture, the residential school system, or the Sixties Scoop

Secret Life of Babies: <http://www.cbc.ca/passionateeye/episodes/secret-life-of-babies>

Secret Life of Babies documents insights into how children develop during the first months of their lives

The Dark Matter of Love: <http://www.cbc.ca/passionateeye/episodes/the-dark-matter-of-love>

The Dark Matter of Love follows an American family that adopts three children from Russia and documents the trials and tribulations of socializing them into a new family and culture.

Twin Sisters: <http://www.cbc.ca/passionateeye/episodes/twin-sisters>

Twin Sisters is a documentary that follows twins who were adopted by different families, one living in the US, the other in Norway. This film raises interesting questions about the role of nature and nurture in the development of the self.