



Jeff Greenberg/Alamy

4

Culture and Socialization

What makes us who we are? Are we born with inherent characteristics, or do we develop our personalities as we move through life? Consider masculinity and femininity. Why might we see women and men approach their sexual relationships differently (a generalization would be to state that heterosexual men in North America are more likely to pursue multiple sexual relationships than are heterosexual women in North America)? Is this the case? If so, why might this be the case? What socialization processes are at work? Is this approach to sexuality culturally specific?

✓ Practice

Chapter 4 Misconception/
Preconception Check

As sociologists we explore how our personalities develop through a complex process of socialization and understand that this socialization is culturally embedded.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this chapter, students will be able to

- 1 Understand the meaning of *culture* and describe its defining features.
- 2 Compare and contrast ethnocentrism and cultural relativism.
- 3 Understand the role that language plays in culture.
- 4 Distinguish between subcultures and countercultures.
- 5 Describe the defining features of Canadian culture and values.
- 6 Describe how discovery, invention/innovation, and diffusion inspire cultural change.
- 7 Describe and critique sociological theories and their application to culture.
- 8 Describe and critique the nature versus nurture debate as it relates to socialization.
- 9 Explain the development of the self from sociological and psychological perspectives.
- 10 Outline how agents of socialization influence a person's sense of self.
- 11 Describe how socialization continues past childhood and throughout the life course.
- 12 Explore the concept of resocialization and the characteristics of total institutions.

1 What Is Culture?

Culture is generally regarded as a complex collection of values, beliefs, behaviours, and material objects shared by a group and passed on from one generation to the next. You may think of culture as the combination of spices that makes each society unique (Ravelli, 2000).

The tremendous diversity that human cultures display is fascinating. For example, think about what we eat. All cultures define what is appropriate to eat; our bodies do not care which foods provide nourishment. Many Canadians eat hamburgers and french fries, but some are known to crave prairie oysters, cod cheeks, or peanut butter and pickle sandwiches. Still, you might feel a little uncomfortable while visiting friends in France if they served you *tête de veau* (calf's head). How would you feel about eating haggis, the Scottish delicacy consisting of a sheep's stomach stuffed with oatmeal and then steamed? In Thailand, water bugs (large, black, hard-shelled insects) are a common cooking ingredient. The foods that each culture defines as appropriate to eat are a reflection of human cultural variation.

culture A complex collection of values, beliefs, behaviours, and material objects shared by a group and passed on from one generation to the next.



Culture: Making Meanings

DEFINING FEATURES OF CULTURE

Sociologists suggest that culture has five defining features:

1. *Culture is learned.* No one is born with culture. Rather, as we grow up we are constantly immersed in the cultural traditions of our parents, siblings, and peers. Everything from our language to our attitudes, values, and worldviews are learned. This does not mean that your culture defines everything about you, but it does suggest that your culture modifies and influences your perceptions, values, and perspectives. For example, as already discussed, what you define as suitable food is a reflection of what your culture deems appropriate.
2. *Culture is shared.* Culture develops as people interact and share experiences and meanings with each other. For example, by cheering for your home team you are sharing cultural experience with others. Shared collective symbols (the Canadian flag, the maple leaf, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police) help to create and maintain group solidarity and cohesion.
3. *Culture is transmitted.* Cultural beliefs and traditions must be passed from generation to generation if they are to survive. For example, many preliterate societies have rich oral traditions in which they tell long and detailed stories as a way of communicating the lessons and experiences of their ancestors. By hearing these stories, children learn about what is important to their culture and what separates them from others.
4. *Culture is cumulative.* As members of each generation refine and modify their cultural beliefs to meet their changing needs, they build on the cultural foundation of their ancestors. For example, Canadian students today are exposed to computers from a very early age and are therefore far more computer literate than students were even 10 years ago. This experience with technology will continue and expand with each successive generation.
5. *Culture is human.* Animals are considered to be social (e.g., a pride of lions, an ant colony) but not cultural. Animals certainly communicate with each other, but the reasons that they communicate are defined by instinct. Natural hierarchies in the animal world are

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Musicians, like Canadian band Arcade Fire, often write songs that express the unique features of a society's culture.

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generally based on physical attributes. In contrast, culture defines how, when, and why humans communicate with each other and with whom. For example, culture helps to define who is appropriate for you to date and guides how and when you ask these people out. Animals do not possess the capacity to plan and organize their behaviours in this way. Since culture is the product of human interaction, it is a distinctly human endeavour¹ (Ravelli, 2000).

These five defining features of culture are important in understanding both the complexity of culture and how groups maintain their uniqueness over time. Culture influences every area of our lives. From what we choose to wear in the morning to the person we decide to marry, culture is everywhere (see Box 4.1 for a discussion of the connection between tattoos and culture). If you stop reading for a moment and take a look around, you will notice that no matter where you are (your dorm room, the library, your favourite coffee shop), everything around you is a reflection of your culture. Even if you are sitting in the park or studying at the library, these environments are shaped by our culture. For example, many cities design park spaces in the urban core to help people feel more relaxed and comfortable, while the library is intended to be a quiet sanctuary where you can focus on your studies so that you can contribute to society after you graduate. These examples illustrate that culture can be divided into two major segments: **material culture**, which includes tangible artifacts, physical objects, and items found in a society; and **nonmaterial culture**, which includes a society's intangible and abstract components, such as values and norms. Both components of culture are inextricably linked with each other.

material culture The tangible artifacts and physical objects found in a given culture.

nonmaterial culture The intangible and abstract components of a society, including values and norms.

BOX 4.1 ■ CANADIAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO SOCIOLOGY

Michael Atkinson

What do tattoos represent to you? If you think they are something pretty to spruce up your shoulder blade, Dr. Michael Atkinson's research into tattoo culture might surprise you. His book *Tattooed: The Sociogenesis of a Body Art* (2003) is based on three years of participant observation within the tattoo culture. He points out that, although academics have traditionally viewed people with tattoos as social misfits or deviants, the current tattoo revolution is inspiring great sociological interest. According to Atkinson, tattoos represent a new vehicle for social communication in that they can reflect not only one's position in a social network but also one's identity and sense of self.

Atkinson draws on the theory of Norbert Elias, who established the term *figurational sociology*, meaning that individuals are bound to one another by extended networks of interdependencies. Atkinson asserts that, within the tattoo culture, these networks are exhibited in the form of body art. For example, one participant's tattoo—in the form of a cross—symbolized for him a rich combination of relationships: school completion (and his parents' faith in him that he would graduate), his Christian faith, and his masculinity (the latter communicated by the tattoo's location on his body).

Because people's tattoos are an expression of their individuality—their tattoos literally become a part of them—they can be powerful statements about how people see the world.



Flesh Wounds:
Marked Bodies in the
Civilizing Process

¹ There is some debate as to the ability of animals to act according to cultural standards. The debate generally involves whether the ability of animals to use tools and to transmit skills from one generation to the next is evidence of culture (see Davidson & McGrew, 2005).

CONTINUED



Michael Atkinson
Michael Atkinson/
McMaster University

investigates masculinity and male cosmetic surgery (2008) and the new urban running phenomenon called *Parkour* (2009).

Not surprisingly, then, many tattoos are intimately associated with strong emotions. Atkinson found that it is not uncommon for individuals to get a tattoo after the death of a loved one or some other significant loss. The tattoo acts as a coping mechanism for those who are in various stages of the grieving process.

Besides *Tattooed*, Atkinson has published numerous journal articles on tattoo culture, including “Tattooing and Civilizing Process: Body Modification as Self-Control” (2004), “Figuring out Body Modification Cultures: Interdependence and Radical Body Modification Process” (2004), “The Civilizing of Resistance: Straightedge Tattooing” (2003), and “Pretty in Ink: Conformity, Resistance, and Negotiation in Women’s Tattooing” (2002). More recently, Atkinson’s research investi-

✱ Explore

Ultimate Ticket:
How Extreme
Fighting Captured
a Generation—and
Its Money

👁 Watch

Research on Culture

Material culture encompasses the physical output of human labour and expression. At the most basic level, our material culture helps us adapt to and prosper in diverse and often challenging physical environments. For example, the Inuit of Canada’s north must endure long, cold winters, and their material culture has responded by developing exceptionally warm clothing and shelters (Balikci, 1970). Conversely, the material culture of the Yanomamö of South America reflects their adaptation to a hot and humid climate through lack of heavy clothing and open-walled huts (Chagnon, 1997). Canadian material culture, like that of the Inuit or Yanomamö, is everything we build and create. A hockey stick and this textbook are examples of Canada’s material culture, as are paintings, snowmobiles, and written music. Canada’s material culture is evident in the university or college you attend, the clothes you wear, and the double-double you drink at hockey games.

Culture is, of course, more than the sum of its material elements. For sociologists, non-material culture represents a wide variety of values and norms that are passed on from generation to generation.

VALUES, NORMS, FOLKWAYS, MORES, LAWS, AND SANCTIONS

values Beliefs about ideal goals and behaviours that serve as standards for social life.

norms Culturally defined rules that outline appropriate behaviours.

For sociologists, values form the foundation of what is considered acceptable. **Values** are the standards by which people define what is desirable or undesirable, good or bad, beautiful or ugly; in other words, they are attitudes about the way the world ought to be. Values are general beliefs that define right and wrong or specify cultural preferences. The beliefs that racial discrimination is wrong and that democracy is right are both values. Values provide the members of a society with general guidelines on what their society deems to be important. For example, in 2007 Canadians viewed government-sponsored health care as one of the most important defining features of their society (Jedwab, 2007; see also Ravelli, 1994, p. 467).

Norms are culturally defined rules that outline appropriate behaviours for a society’s members. Norms help people to know how to act in given social situations. One example of a Canadian norm is our belief that it is rude to speak while your mouth is full. Norms

provide general guidelines on how we should act, and because we learn them from an early age they offer some comfort that we will know how to act in situations we have never faced before (e.g., on your first dinner date, you already know not to speak with your mouth full).

American sociologist W. G. Sumner expanded our understanding of norms in his book *Folkways* (1906/1960). He suggests that there are two different types of norms: *folkways* and *mores*. **Folkways** are informal norms that do not inspire severe moral condemnation when violated—for example, walking on the left side of a busy sidewalk. **Mores**, on the other hand, do inspire strong moral condemnation—for example, extramarital affairs. The important distinction between folkways and mores is not necessarily the act itself but rather the social reaction that the act inspires. Values, norms, mores, and folkways all help society to control those behaviours it deems unacceptable.

A **law** is a particular kind of norm that is formally defined and enacted in legislation. In Canada, it is illegal to steal your neighbour's lawnmower or to cheat on your taxes because there are laws defining these as illegal behaviours. In both cases, the state reserves the right to charge you with a crime because you have broken the law (crime is discussed more fully in Chapter 11).

A **sanction** is anything that rewards appropriate behaviours or penalizes inappropriate ones. An example of a reward for appropriate behaviour is getting an A on your sociology exam because you studied and answered most of the questions correctly; an example of a penalty for inappropriate behaviour is getting an F on the same test because you did not study and answered only 5 of the 25 questions.

These various forms of social control demonstrate the many informal and formal ways in which society responds to behaviours that are deemed to be unacceptable. Our discussion so far has concentrated on our own values and how we respond to members of our own culture when they contravene generally held assumptions about proper behaviour. However, what happens when we encounter actions by people from other cultures?

2 Ethnocentrism and Cultural Relativism

Have you ever travelled to a different country? If so, you probably already know that some of the ways that Canadians think about the world are not shared by everyone. If, for example, you have travelled through Europe, you probably noticed that many more people use mass transit there than we do in Canada. While some Canadian cities have very good public transportation systems, mass transit in Canada pales in comparison to what exists in most European cities. Why are Canadians so resistant to taking public transit? The explanation is probably related to our love affair with our cars but is also perhaps a function of Canada's geography—we are a large country with few people, so the need to move many people efficiently is a relatively recent phenomenon. Only by comparing our own cultural beliefs and customs with those of others can we hope to learn more about ourselves.

Culture is such a powerful influence on our lives that most people exhibit **ethnocentrism**—a tendency to view one's own culture as superior to all others. Being a member of a particular culture instills a sense of group loyalty and pride that is important when unity is necessary—for example, during wars or natural disasters. But for sociologists, or anyone who wants to understand another culture, ethnocentrism is inconsistent with the sociological perspective because it restricts one's ability to appreciate cultural diversity. How boring would it be if everyone you met while travelling behaved in the same way as people at home? Most people believe the best part of travelling is experiencing how other people live.



Organizational Culture: Norms and Values
Individual Rights versus the Common Good

folkways Informal norms that suggest customary ways of behaving.

mores Norms that carry a strong sense of social importance and necessity.

law A type of norm that is formally defined and enacted in legislation.

sanction A penalty for norm violation or a reward for norm adherence.



Organizational Culture: Rules and Conformity



Sex and Temperament in Three Tribes

ethnocentrism The tendency to view one's own culture as superior to all others.

cultural relativism An appreciation that all cultures have intrinsic worth and should be evaluated and understood on their own terms.

culture shock Feelings of disorientation, alienation, depression, and loneliness a person experiences when entering a culture very different from his or her own.

symbol Something that stands for or represents something else.

language A shared symbol system of rules and meanings that governs the production and interpretation of speech.

An alternative to ethnocentrism is **cultural relativism**—appreciating that all cultures have intrinsic worth and should be evaluated and understood on their own terms. To a certain extent, cultural relativism is an ethical position that assumes that no one should judge other people’s customs and traditions before truly trying to understand them. To view the world from a culturally relativist position is often easier said than done because other cultural traditions may seriously challenge our own. Canadians generally adore their pets, so how would you feel if you visited another culture where the dog you petted upon arrival was going to be prepared for dinner that night?

At times, when people encounter cultures that are very different from their own they experience **culture shock**—a feeling of disorientation, alienation, depression, and loneliness that subsides only once a person becomes acclimated to the new culture (Oberg, 1960).

Being aware of ethnocentrism and cultural relativism will help you to become a more informed and critical thinker. Indeed, possessing the sociological imagination requires a conscious effort to appreciate the context of all social behaviour. Anything that makes you question your own values and beliefs, while often a difficult and challenging process, gives you an opportunity to explore your own world—a key to being a good sociologist and citizen of the world.

3 Language and Culture

Another important aspect of understanding culture is to appreciate how language and culture are intricately intertwined, mutually dependent, and socially constructed. All human beings communicate through symbols—a **symbol** is something that stands for or represents something else. A **language** is a shared symbol system of rules and meanings that governs the production and interpretation of speech (Lindsey & Beach, 2003, p. 48). Language is a symbolic form of communication because there is no obvious relationship between the letters *H-U-N-G-R-Y* and the desire to eat, for example. These letters are symbols that English-speaking people have agreed mean that a person wants to eat. Thus, symbols must have established meanings or no one would understand the thoughts or emotions they are trying to convey. Agreed-upon meanings shared by a group of people are, in essence, what distinguishes one culture from another.

As discussed in Chapter 2, one of the main principles of symbolic interactionism is that society (and culture) is socially constructed. This principle suggests that every time we interact with other people we interpret the interaction according to the subjective meanings each of us brings to it. Although shared cultural symbols allow us to interact more smoothly, each of us may bring slightly different meanings to the symbols. For example, some students put much more pressure on themselves to get an A than others do; while the symbol A is the same for everyone, students’ motivation to get an A varies because of their individual meanings and motivations.

Researchers use a variety of techniques to distinguish cultures, but most consider language to be the key identifier of cultural boundaries. Navajo artist Fred Bia states, “My language, to me . . . that’s what makes me unique, that’s what makes me Navajo, that’s what makes me who I am” (McCarty, 2002, p. 179, as cited in McCarty, Romero, & Zepeda, 2006, p. 28).

DOES LANGUAGE DEFINE THOUGHT?

Two early researchers who investigated the potential for language to influence how we interpret our world were Edward Sapir (1884–1939) and Benjamin Lee Whorf (1897–1941).

Their approach, commonly known as the **Sapir-Whorf hypothesis**, suggests that language influences how we perceive the world. For example, if we lived in an area where it does not snow, we would not have a term for this type of precipitation. Our perception of the world, then, is influenced by the limitations of our language; people who speak different languages comprehend the world differently (Chandler, 1994).

Salzmann (2007, p. 54) found that Whorf offered two principles for how language and perception interact. The first principle, called **linguistic determinism**, assumes that the way you think is determined by the language you speak (Grelland, 2006). The second principle, called **linguistic relativism**, suggests that differences between languages do not determine but reflect the different worldviews of their speakers. Kovecses and Koller (2006, p. 34) suggest that you can view the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis as having two forms, a strong version (linguistic determinism) and a weak version (linguistic relativism):

- *Strong version*—language *determines* how we see the world.
- *Weak version*—language *reflects* the way we think.

Recent research has shown, however, that while language and culture are intertwined, there is little evidence to suggest that language actually determines thought or that people who speak different languages cannot perceive the same social reality. Much research has been conducted to determine whether different linguistic groups, given their environmental conditions, have more or fewer terms for colour. For example, Davies and colleagues (1998) found that while English speakers have 11 basic colour terms, Setswana speakers in Botswana have only five. This does not mean that they cannot see as many hues on the colour spectrum—colour perception is stable across populations—but rather that culture influences specific terminology.

So, although the work by Sapir-Whorf was popular in the 1940s and 1950s, contemporary research shows little support for the assertion that language defines how we interpret the world (Lindsey & Beach, 2003, p. 48).

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Nonverbal communication is a complex system of body language that conveys a great deal about what we feel is important. The adage “it is not what you say that is important; it is how you say it” is certainly true. For example, what cues do you use when trying to determine whether a person is lying to you? Generally, you rely on a spectrum of cues (eye contact, nervous tics, body position) that help you ascertain if you can believe this person.

Of the different types of nonverbal communication, body language (particularly facial expressions and gestures), eye contact, and proximity are the ones you are probably most familiar with. However, some of the messages we convey to others can be unconscious. For example, have you ever met someone you know while coming around a corner and when they recognized you, you sensed that they were not really happy to see you even though they said they were? What you might have picked up on were what researchers call micro-expressions. **Micro-expressions** are largely uncontrollable, full-face emotional expressions that last about one-thirtieth of a second before they are suppressed or covered up with a smile (Bartlett et al., 1999, p. 9). Some researchers suggest that these micro-expressions are a window into a person’s true emotions (Ekman, 2003; Ekman & O’Sullivan, 2006; Stewart & Waller, 2009). These micro-expressions were the basis of the television series *Lie to Me*.

Given the myriad ways in which people communicate with one another, an analysis of cultural diversity itself should prove useful.

Sapir-Whorf hypothesis The assertion that language influences how we perceive the world (also known as linguistic determinism).

linguistic determinism Language determines how we perceive the world.

linguistic relativism Language reflects how we perceive the world.



A Town for Sign Language Users

micro-expressions Largely uncontrollable, instantaneous emotional reactions.

4

Cultural Diversity



Challenging Cultural Traditions

subculture A group within a population whose values, norms, folkways, or mores set them apart from the mainstream culture.

counterculture A type of subculture that strongly opposes the widely held cultural patterns of the larger population.

Everyone understands that culture is not a single entity; nor does it stay the same over time. Cultural diversity is a global fact of life—from new immigrants who bring their traditions with them to new communication technologies that expose us to behaviours from other cultures we have never seen before. In the face of such change, some people try to promote their distinctiveness while others challenge the cultural traditions and value systems of the majority.

SUBCULTURES: MAINTAINING UNIQUENESS

A **subculture** is a group within a population whose values, norms, folkways, or mores set them apart from the mainstream culture. You can see this diversity in any one of Canada's many ethnic communities: Toronto's two Little Italy neighbourhoods, Vancouver's Chinatown, Montreal's Jewish community, or Halifax's black community are all examples of subcultures existing, and prospering, within the larger Canadian culture.

As these examples suggest, subcultures are often based on race, ethnicity, and religion. But they can also be based on age, sexuality, occupation, recreational activities, or any activity, belief system, or special interest that the participants value enough to want to associate with others like themselves (Lindsey & Beach, 2003, p. 56). Subcultures exist largely to promote their members' interests, but not in a manner that is contrary to the larger culture that surrounds them. For example, the majority of student clubs or groups at your school no doubt focus on single activities or interests (a ski club, student safewalk programs, etc.); their members welcome the association with each other, and society as a whole is not worried about membership in this group. Members of subcultures often promote their own rules of behaviour and provide support and guidance for their members, just as the larger society does.

COUNTERCULTURES: CHALLENGING CONFORMITY

When members of a subculture become increasingly distinct from the larger society around them, they may become a counterculture. A **counterculture** is a type of subculture that strongly opposes the widely held cultural patterns of the larger population.

The term was popularized by American history professor Theodore Roszak in his book *The Making of a Counterculture* (1969). When this book was published it captured the imaginations of young American students who were protesting the Vietnam War, rebelling against traditional society, and experimenting with drugs (Dyck, 2005). Roszak's work investigated the frustrations of many student radicals and hippie dropouts who rejected the goals and aspirations of corporate America. This movement filtered into Canada as an estimated 50 000 young men from the United States fled the draft (Hagan & Hansford-Bowles, 2005). The anti-war movement became associated with rock music, sexual experimentation, and illegal drug use (particularly marijuana)—all of which parents and society as a whole viewed as subversive, dangerous, and immoral (Lindsey & Beach, 2003, p. 57).

Other countercultures include religious minorities that find themselves in opposition to the broader society, such as the Puritans in seventeenth-century England. In twentieth-century Canada, the Sons of Freedom Doukhobors blew up property and paraded naked to express their opposition to sending their children to school and serving in the armed forces (Soukeroff, 1959). Criminal subcultures such as the Mafia or the Hells Angels Motorcycle Club are also examples of countercultures.

A wide variety of countercultures continue to exist today. As was the case in the anti-war movement of the 1960s, many members of countercultures, though certainly not all, are young. Teenagers and young adults are likely to use appearance to express opposition, with the flowing hair of the 1960s giving way to torn clothing, spiked hair, body piercings, and

tattoos in later decades. Today's countercultures include people who gather at international conferences to fight what they perceive as the threat of globalization and corporate culture, people who seek a freer and more egalitarian society, or people who chain themselves to trees slated to be bulldozed so that highways can be built. Other groups, such as the Aryan Nations and the Heritage Front, have a racist, anti-Semitic agenda and have been implicated in numerous violent activities. Still other countercultures, such as youth street gangs, have no interest in social reform; instead, they seek a sense of belonging, often expressed through special clothing, secret signs, and specialized language. Some groups of homeless youth identify themselves with countercultural perspectives (Kidd & Evans, 2011). What these diverse countercultures have in common is that, like other subcultures and the broader culture within which they exist, they provide feelings of belonging as well as support for their members.

5 Defining Features of Canadian Culture

According to many Canadian sociologists, Canadian culture has been shaped by an intricate and diverse set of geographic, historical, and social circumstances (Ravelli, 2000).

Geographically, Canada is the second largest country in the world and is blessed with rich and diverse natural resources (Hiller, 1996). Noted Canadian writer Margaret Atwood believes that Canada's adaptation to a harsh physical environment has defined its culture and to some extent has defined what it means to be Canadian (Atwood, 1972, p. 33, cited in Lipset, 1986, p. 124). Socially, Canadian culture has been defined by the coexistence of and conflict between the English and the French (Hiller, 1996). The fact that more than 80 percent of people living in Quebec identify French as their mother tongue suggests that, on this criterion at least, Quebec is certainly distinct from the rest of the country. However, the province's distinctiveness does not rest solely on language but also on Quebecers' shared history, symbols, ideas, and perceptions of reality (McGuigan, 1997). The influence of Quebec society on Canadian culture is beyond challenge.

The search for elements that define Canadian culture is necessarily a comparative exercise because we cannot try to understand ourselves in a vacuum. Indeed, Canadians, historically at least, have defined themselves by what they are not: Americans (Lipset, 1990, p. 53). Studying how Canadians are different from Americans fascinates Canadians, particularly Canadian sociologists. As well, one American sociologist, Seymour Martin Lipset (1922–2006), based his career on studying what makes Canadians and Americans different (Waller, 1990). Lipset's book *Continental Divide* (1990) summarizes and consolidates his almost 50 years of research on Canadian–American differences. He argues that Canadians are more elitist and ascriptive than Americans (i.e., they are more inclined to accept that people are born with different statuses). They are also more community oriented than Americans and more appreciative of racial and ethnic variation.

According to Lipset, the primordial event that generated the different founding ideologies of Canada and the United States was the American Revolution. The United States emerged from the revolution as a manifestation of the classic liberal state, rejecting all ties to the British throne, the rights gained by royal birth, and communal responsibility. On the other hand, English Canada fought to maintain its imperial ties through the explicit rejection of liberal revolutions (Lipset, 1986). Canadian identity was not defined by a successful revolution but, instead, by a successful counterrevolution (Lipset, 1993). The United States, conversely, was defined by a rigid and stable ideology Lipset called Americanism.

Lipset argues that evidence of Canadian and American founding ideologies is present in each country's literature. American literature concentrates on themes of winning, opportunism, and confidence, while Canadian writing focuses on defeat, difficult physical circumstances, and abandonment by Britain (Lipset, 1990). Lipset cites Atwood, who suggests that national

symbols reveal a great deal about the cultural values a nation embraces. According to Atwood, the defining symbol for the United States is “the frontier,” which inspires images of vitality and unrealized potential; for Canada, the defining symbol is “survival”: “Canadians are forever taking the national pulse like doctors at a sickbed; the aim is not to see whether the patient will live well but simply whether he will live at all” (Atwood, 1972, p. 33, cited in Lipset, 1986, p. 124). Lipset suggests that the symbols, attitudes, and values of a people do not exist in a vacuum but rather are embodied in and reinforced by social and political institutions (Baer, Grabb, & Johnston, 1990; Lipset, 1990). Values manifest themselves in all social realms and structures.

Lipset’s research has been the subject of much interest, debate, and pointed criticism. Sociologists generally agree that Canadian and American cultural values differ, but there is no clear consensus on what constitutes their specific differences.

6 Cultural Change

As you can see, cultures are always changing to address new social and technological challenges. Consider how Canadian culture was changed by the implementation of the telephone, television, and affordable air travel, or by modifications to the laws allowing divorce and abortion. Social scientists generally consider three different sources for inspiring cultural change: discovery, invention/innovation, and diffusion (Grubler, 1996; see also Ravelli, 2000).

discovery Occurs when something previously unrecognized or understood is found to have social or cultural applications.

invention/innovation Occurs when existing cultural items are manipulated or modified to produce something new and socially valuable.

diffusion Occurs when cultural items or practices are transmitted from one group to another.

Discovery occurs when something previously unrecognized or understood is found to have social or cultural applications. Historically, discovery involved findings from the natural world—for example, fire and gravity. Today, discoveries can occur as a result of the scientific process—for example, the ability to split the atom allowed for the production of weapons of mass destruction but also the generation of inexpensive electricity.

Invention/innovation occurs when existing cultural items are manipulated or modified to produce something new and socially valuable. The differences between invention and innovation may appear slight, but the distinction is important. *Invention* refers to creating something completely new that has not existed before—for example, Marconi’s (1874–1937) device that received the first transatlantic wireless communication at Signal Hill in St. John’s, Newfoundland, in 1901. *Innovation* refers to manipulating existing ideas or technologies to create something new, or to applying them to something for which they were not originally intended—for example, the carbon filament in light bulbs was replaced when the much more trustworthy and long-lasting tungsten filament was used (see IN-VSEE, n.d.).

Diffusion occurs when cultural items or practices are transmitted from one group to another. Consider, for example, the influence that American media have on cultural practices throughout the world. Canadian sociologist Marshall McLuhan understood the power of media and their ability to transcend geopolitical borders when he coined the phrase *global village* (McLuhan, 1964). While telecommunications have made the world feel like a smaller place, American mass media have also promoted a “culture of thinness” that has diffused throughout popular culture (Media Awareness Network, 2010).

7 Sociological Approaches to Culture and Culture Change

As you learned in Chapter 2, sociological theory attempts to explain all social phenomena—and culture is certainly of great theoretical interest.

FUNCTIONALISM

Functionalism approaches the value of culture from the premise that, since every society must meet basic needs (water, food, and shelter), culture can best be understood as playing a role in helping to meet those needs. What is fascinating is how differently human societies go about it: Thais eat water beetles and Scots eat haggis; the Inuit live in igloos and the Pueblo live in adobes. And while North Americans dam rivers not only to quench their thirst but also to water their lawns, it is predicted that by 2020 India will no longer be able to meet its water needs (World Bank, n.d.).

Yet within this diversity are common features that all known societies are believed to share, referred to as **cultural universals**. The first researcher to investigate these universals was George Peter Murdock (1897–1985), a functionalist anthropologist and sociologist. In *The Common Denominator of Culture* (1945), Murdock compiled a list of more than 70 cultural features common to virtually all known human societies (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 highlights that all known human societies treat people differently based on their age (age grading), have rules about who can be considered appropriate sexual partners (incest taboos), use personal names for individuals, and play games—to name only a few cultural universals. Although the particulars may vary (e.g., the specific ages that define age grades, the types of games played), functionalists assert that these universals reinforce the position that social life is best understood by considering what individual practices or beliefs do for the collective.

Functionalists argue that unique cultural traditions and customs develop and persist because they are adaptive and improve a people's chances of survival (Lindsey, Beach, & Ravelli, 2009, p. 68). **Cultural adaptation** is the process by which environmental pressures are addressed through changes in practices, traditions, and behaviours as a way of maintaining stability and equilibrium. Because functionalists argue that every social practice leads to some collective benefit, any practice that diminishes a culture's ability to prosper will be unlikely to survive.

For example, Canadians have finally begun to realize the hazards of drinking and driving. In 1987, there were 2250 fatally injured drivers, and 53.1 percent of these drivers tested positive for alcohol. In 2006 there were 1738 drivers killed, but the percentage who tested positive for alcohol had declined to 37.1 percent (Solomon, Organ, Abdoullaeva, Gwyer, & Chiodo, 2009). Perhaps as Canadians have become more conscious of the costs of drinking and driving as a result of educational programs and increased enforcement, the culture around drinking and driving has changed accordingly.

Critiquing the Functionalist Approach to Culture One of functionalism's greatest strengths is how it demonstrates that some elements of culture do operate to fulfill human



Differing Explanations
of Cultural Variation

cultural universals
Common cultural
features found in
all societies.

cultural adaptation
The process by
which environmental
pressures are
addressed through
changes in
practices, traditions,
and behaviours.

TABLE 4.1 Cultural Universals

Age grading	Body adornment
Division of labour	Courtship
Property rights	Music and dance
Family/kinship groups	Incest taboos
Status differences	Cleanliness training
Cooking	Magic/luck/superstitions
Personal names	Hospitality/greetings
Language	Games
Gestures	Jokes

Source: Reprinted with permission of Sociology Central.



needs. However, by focusing on how cultural elements work together to maintain stability, functionalism does not take into account tension from subcultures or countercultures. While a group of women getting together on the weekends to play recreational hockey (a subculture) may be of no threat to social stability, an outlaw biker gang that challenges the larger society's laws, value system, and beliefs (a counterculture) may warrant concern. Even though a countercultural movement may inspire progressive social change, the overriding assumption of functionalist theory is stability. To assume that cultural traditions are always useful for the system denies the real pain and suffering they sometimes cause. For example, before the US Civil War, many people accepted slavery because it was "just the way things have always been done." However, the positives for the white slave owners do not excuse this morally reprehensible practice. Cultural traditions may help to bind people together, but it may be impossible to justify or defend how they benefit society as a whole (i.e., what were the "benefits" of slavery for the slaves?).

CONFLICT THEORY

As discussed in Chapter 2, conflict theory views society as based on tension and conflict over scarce resources. Conflict theorists assert that those who hold power define and perpetuate a culture's ideology and create a value system that defines social inequality as just and proper (Lindsey, Beach, & Ravelli, 2009, p. 69). Conflict theorists would certainly approach the slavery example we used above from a very different perspective: that slavery was allowed to exist because it benefited rich white people. Consider our own contemporary views of wealth and success. The culture and the values that support the belief that success requires money are a demonstration of the power of ideology. After all, if people are working hard their whole lives trying to get ahead, how much time do they have to think about how the system exploits them? Conflict theorists view the link between money and success as an expression of the ruling elite's power and influence.

A Canadian example of how the elite can use their power to dominate the less powerful is the Canadian residential school system. Between the 1890s and 1960s, the Canadian government funded the residential school system for Aboriginal children. Almost everyone recognized that the government's motive was not only to educate the children but also to assimilate them into the dominant white society. In 1969, the government's White Paper recommended the elimination of all legal discrimination against Aboriginal peoples, the abolition of the Department of Indian Affairs, and the integration of First Nations peoples into the dominant society (see Murray, 2003). Any policy advocating the assimilation of a unique minority group is an abuse of power and a demonstration of the dominant culture's attempt to absorb a less powerful one.

According to Karl Marx, the dominant culture eventually becomes part of the oppressed group's value system. Ultimately, the oppressed group begins to view its own culture as inferior and tries to improve its position by adopting the ways of the dominant culture. Given what you know, do you understand why some Aboriginal peoples may feel like outsiders and want to become more like members of the dominant (i.e., white) culture? If this is the case, can the Canadian residential school system be seen as an example of ethnocentrism?

Critiquing the Conflict Approach to Culture The conflict approach suggests that cultural systems perpetuate social inequality. As discussed in Chapter 2, conflict theorists believe that society's elite use ideology to further their own interests and protect themselves from opposition. By defining what the dominant classes perceive as positive, cultural elements promote social inequality through the belief that to be successful you have to be like the elite, thereby perpetuating their control and power.

On one hand, conflict theory would be supportive of Aboriginal peoples' efforts at cultural preservation, but on the other hand conflict theorists would recognize that by maintaining their

traditions Aboriginal peoples are isolating and marginalizing themselves from the dominant culture. Overall, the conflict approach favours the notion that cultural change is more beneficial to oppressed people than is cultural continuity (Lindsey, Beach, & Ravelli, 2009, p. 70).

Functionalists view culture as a way of integrating and building on similarities and establishing a sense of community, while conflict theorists view culture as a vehicle for promoting and maintaining social inequality. Both perspectives would benefit from greater reflection on the other theory's insights. For example, functionalism would benefit by recognizing that culture can be used as a vehicle for oppression, and conflict theory would benefit by acknowledging the potential social benefits gained by uniting people into a common cultural group.

SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

As discussed in Chapter 2, symbolic interactionists argue that social reality is the result of human interaction. One of the most famous symbolic interactionists, Herbert Blumer (1969), suggested that people do not respond directly to the world around them but instead to the meanings they collectively apply to it. As a microsociological perspective, symbolic interactionism investigates how culture is actively created and re-created through social interaction. Thus, as people go about their everyday lives they create and modify culture as they engage in the negotiation of reality based on shared meanings grounded in cultural symbols.

The values and norms defining minority status, for example, are the result of mutual interaction and social definition. People interpret and actively engage with nonmaterial cultural artifacts (symbols) in every social situation they encounter. Therefore, minority status is a social category created by interacting individuals and manifests itself in society through negotiated social interaction. For example, each time a member of the dominant (i.e., white) culture encounters an Aboriginal person, he or she assigns that person to a category based on predefined cultural meanings, which influences how he or she interacts with that person. This serves to reinforce the dominant cultural norms of who minority people are and how they are supposed to act (e.g., be deferential). However, since these meanings are actively negotiated, there is also great potential for resisting and changing dominant cultural meanings because they are fluid and constantly open to reinterpretation and reflection. According to symbolic interactionists, then, culture is the set of symbols to which we collectively assign values and the result of our active engagement with those around us (Lindsey, Beach, & Ravelli, 2009, p. 72).

Critiquing the Symbolic Interactionist Approach to Culture Symbolic interactionists rightly point out that culture results from social interaction and collective engagement with our surroundings. However, suggesting that changing cultural definitions requires changing how we define and classify people diminishes the reality that some cultural definitions result from structural oppression and discrimination (e.g., the residential school system, Japanese-Canadian internment camps during World War II, etc.). As a microsociological approach, symbolic interactionism, while tremendously insightful about interpersonal definitions of cultural meanings, is less able to explain large cultural manifestations than are functionalist or conflict theories.

Each theoretical approach, then, views culture quite differently; however, as we continue to stress, this diversity is not a sociological weakness but rather a strength of the discipline.

8 Becoming “Human”

To fully understand what it means to be human is to appreciate that, as far as we know, we are the only organisms that can *think about thinking*. How we think about ourselves and the world is an important and dynamic area of research for social scientists.



Can't Stand Putting
Your Money at Risk?
Blame DNA.

personality An individual's relatively stable pattern of behaviours and feelings.

nature versus nurture The debate between whether biological forces or the environment defines the person we become.

socialization The lifelong process by which we learn our culture, develop our personalities, and become functioning members of society.

social interaction The ways in which people interact in social settings, recognizing each person's subjective experiences or intentions.



The Nature-Nurture Debate



Final Notes on a Case of Extreme Isolation

There are two basic approaches to understanding how we develop our **personalities**—broadly defined as an individual's relatively stable pattern of behaviours and feelings—and become members of the larger society. These are the biological approach and the environmental approach, traditionally referred to as the **nature versus nurture** debate. The *nature* side of the debate holds that our actions and feelings stem from our biological roots. Those on the *nurture* side of the debate argue that we are the product of our **socialization**—the lifelong process by which we learn our culture, develop our personalities, and become functioning members of society. Our sense of the world and of ourselves, then, is seen as the result of **social interaction**, which encompasses all of the ways that people interact in social settings while recognizing each person's subjective experiences or intentions.

The nature argument suggests that most of our behaviour is determined by our genetic makeup. Although sociologists assume that the nurture side is more important in determining the person you become, they also appreciate that biology plays a role in explaining some key aspects of your behaviour, such as athletic ability and intellectual capacity. Sociologists remain committed to the belief that the factors influencing the people we become are defined not by nature but rather by nurture.

Perhaps the most compelling argument to explain why sociologists believe that we become the people we are through social interaction is what happens when young children are isolated from human contact.

Effects of Social Isolation One of the most famous cases of isolation was that of a five-year-old girl, Anna, who was discovered in 1938 by a social worker visiting a Pennsylvania farmhouse. When she was discovered, Anna was tied to a chair and was so severely undernourished she could barely stand on her own. It was discovered that she had been born to a mentally handicapped single mother and kept in the attic by her grandfather because he was embarrassed about her illegitimacy (Lindsey, Beach, & Ravelli, 2009, p. 83). Upon hearing about Anna, sociologist Kinsley Davis immediately travelled to see her and was overwhelmed by what he found. Deprived of normal human contact and receiving only a minimal amount of care to keep her alive, Anna could not talk, walk, or do anything that demonstrated even basic intellectual capacity.

After working with Anna for two years, Davis had been able to teach her to walk, understand simple commands, and feed herself. After two more years, she had learned basic toilet habits, could use a spoon when eating, and could dress herself. However, at age nine she was less than 1.3 metres tall and weighed only 27 kilograms. When Anna died at age 10 from a blood disorder, she had only progressed to the intellectual capacity of a two-and-a-half-year-old. While she could talk in phrases, she never developed a true capacity for language. Her isolation from other people during virtually her entire early life prevented her from developing more than a small fraction of her intellectual potential (adapted from Davis, 1947; Lindsey, Beach, & Ravelli, 2009, p. 83).

Another disturbing example of human isolation is the case of five-year-old Jeffrey Baldwin, who was found dead when Toronto emergency workers arrived at his grandparents' home in 2002. The subsequent investigation revealed that he had been confined to his room for years (CBC News, 2007a). At the time of his discovery, Jeffrey weighed only 9.5 kilograms and was less than 1 metre tall. It was obvious from the condition of his body that he had died from malnutrition and neglect—an especially horrible outcome in a home with six adults and five other healthy children. Both grandparents were sentenced to life imprisonment after being convicted of second-degree murder. Although Jeffrey's intellectual and social development at the time of his death are uncertain, research into human isolation suggests that he never would have recovered from such abuse if he had lived.

The importance of human interaction is obvious in light of such cases of children who have suffered from severe neglect. Sociologists argue that social reality is constructed by

people every time they interact with others. In fact, contemporary research suggests that the nature/nurture debate may in fact be a false dichotomy (see Bradshaw & Ellison, 2009; Lamm & Jablonka, 2008; Wagner, 2009, p. 301). Human beings are the wonderful product of both genetics and social interactions. Our genetic makeup (nature) gives us the capacity to be social beings, but it is the process of social interaction (nurture) that enables us to develop that capacity.

While the nature argument is interesting, sociologists argue that nurture plays a far more central role in defining our behaviour than a genetic legacy from our past.

9 Development of Self: Sociological Insights

Every person is unique; just like snowflakes, no two people are completely alike. The **self** may be defined as “a composite of thoughts and feelings” from which we derive our “conception of who and what” we are (Jersild, 1952, p. 9). The self, or one’s identity, comprises a set of learned values and attitudes that develops through social interaction and defines one’s self-image. Our **self-image** is an introspective composition of various features and attributes that we see ourselves as having. The self is a key component of *personality*, defined on page 102 as an individual’s relatively stable pattern of behaviours and feelings. In healthy individuals, the personality and self join to give an individual the sense that he or she is unique and special.

IMAGINING HOW OTHERS SEE US: C. H. COOLEY

In Chapter 2, we discussed Cooley’s concept of the looking-glass self, whereby what we think of ourselves is influenced by how we imagine other people see us (Cooley, 1902). Indeed, as evidenced by isolated and feral children, consciousness cannot develop without social interaction. According to Cooley, to be aware of oneself one must be aware of society. Self-consciousness and social consciousness are inseparable because people cannot conceive of themselves without reference to others. Therefore, the self does not emerge independently in the mind but instead is the result of social interaction.

One of Cooley’s most famous statements was that sociologists must “imagine imaginations” (as cited in Rossides, 1998, p. 225). According to Cooley (1902), sociologists could not hope to understand the social world until they could project themselves into the minds of others and see the world as those people did—the essence of the sociological imagination and the sociological perspective.

UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES AND OTHERS: G. H. MEAD

Building on Cooley’s investigation into the development of self, Mead argued that the self is composed of two complementary elements. He referred to the first element as the **I**, the part of the self that is spontaneous, creative, impulsive, and often unpredictable (Lindsey & Beach, 2003, p. 94). The **I** is the part of consciousness that responds to things emotionally. For example, imagine how you might respond if you found out that you had won a free trip to Mexico. Chances are you would jump up and down and wave your arms in the air to express your excitement.

However, Mead suggested that while you are jumping up and down, you are also conscious of how others view you. Excitement is one thing, but we have all witnessed instances where someone does not recognize when “enough is enough.” Mead called this second level of consciousness the **me**. According to Mead, the **me** is the socialized element of the self, the part of your consciousness that thinks about how to behave so that, for example, you don’t

self One’s identity, comprising a set of learned values and attitudes that develops through social interaction and defines one’s self-image.

self-image An introspective composition of various features and attributes that people see themselves as having.



Theories of Human Development

I Mead’s term for that element of the self that is spontaneous, creative, impulsive, and often unpredictable.

me Mead’s term for the socialized element of the self.

significant others

People we want to impress or gain approval from.

generalized other

A compilation of attributes associated with the average member of society; represents an individual's appreciation that other members of society behave within certain socially accepted guidelines and rules.

role-taking Assuming the position of another to better understand that person's perspective.

 **Explore**

Socialization:
The Internalization
of Reality

embarrass yourself. The *me*, in other words, helps us control the spontaneous impulses of the *I*. The sense of conflict we feel when we are compelled to act one way but discipline ourselves to act in another demonstrates the dynamic relationship between the *I* and the *me* and their influence on our everyday behaviour.

Our understanding of ourselves and our social environment is also influenced by those around us. When we are with our friends, for example, we tend to behave differently than we do when we are with our family. To understand this influence more fully, Mead investigated how we attribute different levels of importance to those around us (Mead, 1934). He called people we want to impress or gain approval from **significant others**. When we are children, our parents are the most important people in our lives and so are considered significant others. As we mature (around age 12), the importance of our family wanes somewhat and we become aware of those in the broader social world who influence our behaviours. Mead called these people the **generalized other**—not any one specific person but rather a compilation of attributes that we associate with the average member of society. This conception of a generalized other represents the recognition that other members of society behave within certain socially accepted guidelines and rules. Understanding the generalized other and how they would feel or behave in certain situations gives the individual a reference point for proper and expected behaviour.

Critical to explaining symbolic interactionists' analysis of how we interpret ourselves, other people, and the social world is the concept of **role-taking**—assuming the position of another to better understand that person's perspective. Role-taking is critical for empathizing with another person's situation. By imagining what it would be like to be homeless, for example, you inevitably become more empathetic to how homeless people must feel and more compassionate about their needs. Similarly, imagining how other people may respond to a given social situation enables you to better anticipate their actions and to respond to them in a manner you have considered in advance.

Mead also contributed to our understanding of how we develop our sense of self through social interaction by investigating how young children are socialized. He asserted that, as they grow up, children pass through a series of three distinct stages.

Preparatory Stage (Birth to Age Three) Young children's first experiences when interacting with others are to imitate what they see others doing. Although children do not understand the meanings behind these early interactions, they want to please the significant others in their lives (usually their parents). Through positive and negative reinforcement, children begin to develop the *I*, but the *me* is also forming in the background.

Play Stage (Ages Three to Five) Children learn a great deal about themselves and the society around them through play. As children begin to assume the roles of others ("I'll be Batman and you be Robin"), they move beyond simple imitation and assume the imagined roles of the characters they are playing. During this stage, the *me* continues to grow because children want to receive positive reinforcement from their significant others. Because language skills are developing throughout this stage, children can more accurately communicate their thoughts and feelings—a skill that must be mastered before a stable sense of self can emerge.

Game Stage (Elementary School Years) As children continue to develop, they become increasingly proficient at taking on multiple roles at once (student, son or daughter, friend) and by doing so begin to identify with the generalized other. Participating in complex games that require them to play a particular role (e.g., playing defence on a hockey team) teaches them to understand their individual position as well as the needs of the group. The skills developed during the game stage are readily transferred to other real-life situations (Lindsey, Beach, & Ravelli, 2009, p. 90; Mead, 1934). According to Mead, the game stage



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Playing in groups helps young people perform multiple roles at one time.

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marks the period during which **primary socialization** occurs; this is when people learn the attitudes, values, and appropriate behaviours for individuals in their culture. As language skills are refined throughout the game stage, children begin to gain their first sense of self as a unique individual.

Secondary socialization occurs later, in early adolescence and beyond, through participation in groups that are more specific than the broader society and that have defined roles and expectations. Part-time jobs, city-wide sports teams, and volunteer activities are all examples of secondary groups. Because these groups are more specialized than primary groups, they allow individuals to develop the skills needed to fit in with various other groups of people throughout their lives (Furseth & Repstad, 2006, p. 115).

Considered from a sociological perspective, socialization is a lifelong process; after all, we interact with others throughout our lives and constantly change and grow as a result.

DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS: W. E. B. DU BOIS

In 1903, American black sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963) published the groundbreaking work *The Souls of Black Folk*. In the book, Du Bois famously described black Americans as possessing a **double consciousness**—being caught between a self-concept as an American but also as a black person of African descent. As Du Bois put it, “The Negro ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings . . . two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (as cited in McWhorter, 2003). For Du Bois, double consciousness was on one hand a deprivation (the inability to see oneself independently from the white majority) but on the other hand a gift (because it enabled a type of “second sight” that allowed for a deeper reflective comprehension of the contemporary world) (Edwards, 2007, p. xiv). Black Americans had to see the world and themselves as whites did to survive and prosper in dominant white society. But at the same time they maintained a separate consciousness, one fully

primary socialization

Occurs when people learn the attitudes, values, and appropriate behaviours for individuals in their culture.

secondary

socialization Follows primary socialization and occurs through participation in more specific groups with defined roles and expectations.

double consciousness

Du Bois’s term for a sense of self that is defined, in part, through the eyes of others.



W. E. B. Du Bois

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[LC-USZ62-16767]



aware of their oppression. So, double consciousness is necessary and possible only through and because of their ongoing oppression (Haney, 2010).

For our purposes, double consciousness is similar to Mills's sociological imagination in that it requires the person to transcend the taken-for-granted world. To be socialized as a member of any minority group (described more fully in Chapter 7) requires a perception of self that is at least partially defined through the eyes of others. Ultimately, the power of the dominant culture to stereotype minority groups is a form of cultural imperialism, where negative images are internalized by minorities, and results in oppression and subjugation (Allen, 2008, p. 162).

Not only do Du Bois's insights continue to help sociologists explore the social realities of black Americans, they are also applicable to any socially marginalized groups, including racial, ethnic, and sexual minorities.

Central to understanding socialization are what sociologists refer to as the *agents of socialization*.

10

Agents of Socialization

agents of socialization

Individuals, groups, and social institutions that together help people become functioning members of society.

Agents of socialization are the individuals, groups, and social institutions that together help people to become functioning members of society. Although we are defined by our biology as well as our psychological development, according to sociologists we are defined most significantly by the society around us. Today, the four principal agents of socialization are families, peers, education, and mass media.

FAMILIES

Families are by far the most important agents of socialization because they are, for most children, the centre of their lives. During the important formative period, families provide children with nourishment, love, and protection and guide their first experiences with the social world (a topic we return to in Chapter 8). In the first years of life, families are largely responsible for children's emerging identities, self-esteem, and personalities. In fact, the first values and attitudes that a child embraces are generally simple reflections of his or her family's values and attitudes. Canadian researchers (Hastings, McShane, Parker, & Ladha, 2007) found that parents teach children how to behave prosocially (i.e., be nice) from a very early age. Families are also responsible for establishing acceptable gender roles, social classes, and ethnic identities for children.

Much like symbolic interactionists, social learning theorists emphasize the importance of observing and imitating the behaviours, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others (Bandura, 1977). When parents model what they believe to be acceptable roles for men and women, their child tends to imitate and internalize those patterns. For example, some parents assign different chores to daughters and sons (the daughter may help in the kitchen while the son may mow the lawn), which reinforces **gender stereotyping** that influences what each child considers to be appropriate roles for men and women.

Families are also responsible for assigning the **socioeconomic status (SES)** position to its members (discussed more fully in Chapter 5). Socioeconomic status is determined by the family's income, parents' education level, parents' occupations, and the family's social standing within the community (e.g., members of local organizations, involved in recreational programs, etc.). Growing up rich or poor, knowing whether you are expected to attend university or college, and appreciating how your family is viewed within the local community become part of a person's identity. Affluent parents are better able to provide their children with diverse leisure activities (music and dance lessons, extracurricular sports, travel) that



Gender Socialization

gender stereotyping

The assignment of beliefs to men and women that are not based on fact.

socioeconomic status

(SES) A combination of variables (e.g., income, education, occupation, etc.) used to rank people into a hierarchical structure.

tend to contribute to children’s **cultural capital**, a term coined by French philosopher and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002). He described how children’s social assets (values, beliefs, attitudes, and competencies in language and culture), gained from their families, help them in school and prepare them for success, which in turn reproduces ruling class culture (Bourdieu, 1973).

cultural capital Social assets (values, beliefs, attitudes, competencies) that are gained from one’s family and help one to succeed in life.

PEERS

Would you agree that the extent of your family’s influence on your life changed when you became a teenager? As we saw in the discussion of developmental stages, the importance of one’s friends, or peers, increases during adolescence. During this time, friends are very influential in defining what adolescents think about the world and how they feel about themselves. Part of growing up is leaving the support of your family and putting yourself in situations that can be as frightening as they are invigorating (think, for example, of your first school dance).

Peer groups consist of people who are closely related in age and share similar interests. We first formally meet other young children in school. There, children have to make their own friends for the first time, and they soon find out that not everyone likes them (unlike in their families). This puts a great deal of pressure on them to find peers they can relate to and prefer to spend time with. Recent research by Abrams, Rutland, Pelletier, and Ferrell (2009) investigates how children exclude others from their peer groups as a way of asserting their membership with the “in” group. If you think back to high school, we are confident you can come up with some examples of the negative effects suffered by students who were excluded and ostracized by their peers.

As children mature, their friends become increasingly important to them. To a young person, belonging to a peer group is vital for establishing a sense of community as well as for achieving and maintaining social influence (Matthews, 2005, p. 42). When you think back to some of the regrettable things you have done, many of them likely occurred when

peer groups Consist of people who are closely related in age and share similar interests.



Youth, Sex, and Crime



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Peer groups are an important agent of socialization.

William Perugini/
Shutterstock.com

you were with your friends. Research confirms that teenagers who have friends who are disruptive in school are more likely to become disruptive themselves (Berndt & Keefe, 1995). This finding supports the wealth of research suggesting that peer involvement is the key ingredient in adolescent drug use and other forms of delinquent behaviour (McCarthy, 2007; McCarthy & Casey, 2008). Peer groups can also form the basis of a subculture, as demonstrated in Bengtsson's (2012) research on the socialization of boys into a gangster subculture.

In a related study of skater girls, Kelly, Pomerantz, and Currie (2005) found that some of these young women actively participated in an alternative girlhood in which they redefined themselves in ways that challenged the traditional discourse of what it meant to be feminine. By doing so, they were able to distance themselves from the sexism evident in skater culture and forge a positive identity for themselves. Post-structuralists (discussed in Chapter 2) would argue that by deconstructing their images, these young women were actively engaged in defining who they were and were not afraid to push social boundaries. Sara, a 14-year-old skater, commented on the freedom gained by breaking away from social expectations:

That's why I like being alternative, because you can break so many more rules. If you hang out with the cliques and the mainstreamers and the pop kids, there's so many more rules that you have to follow. And if you don't follow [them] . . . you're no longer cool, and they start rumors about you. (Kelly, Pomerantz, & Currie, 2005, p. 246)

EDUCATION

Consider how long you have been in school. From daycare to university, you were, and still are, being socialized. In contrast to the family, school ideally evaluates children on what they do rather than who they are. Children not only acquire necessary knowledge and skills but also learn new social roles by interacting with teachers and peers. In Canadian culture, the socialization function of education emphasizes that children learn academic content, social skills, and important cultural values (Lindsey, Beach, & Ravelli, 2009, p. 84).

hidden curriculum
The unconscious, informal, and unwritten norms and rules that reinforce and maintain social conventions.

Another important consideration is the role of the **hidden curriculum** (also discussed in Chapter 9). The hidden curriculum asserts that beyond schools' conscious, formal obligations to teach course content are the unconscious, informal, and unwritten rules that reinforce and maintain social conventions. For example, while the conscious purpose of your English courses is to teach you how to interpret literary texts, the unconscious purpose of reading all of those books and writing all of those papers is to reinforce how to behave in society.

The hidden curriculum also plays an important role in gender role socialization. Teachers, even those who care deeply about their students and believe that they are treating girls and boys equally, are often unaware that they perpetuate gender-based stereotypes (Myhill & Jones, 2006, p. 100). Teachers often perceive that girls work harder and that boys are more likely to be disruptive. While our memories of school may reinforce this perception, it is important to note that if a teacher enters the classroom thinking that girls are more diligent and boys are more difficult to handle, this may become a *self-fulfilling prophecy*—a prediction that, once made, makes the outcome occur.

Research shows that although schools can unintentionally socialize children to perpetuate stereotypes, they also genuinely strive to use their influence to benefit children and society. Sociologists recognize that today's schools are shouldering a bigger share of the socialization function in Canada than ever before (Lindsey, Beach, & Ravelli, 2009, p. 84).

MASS MEDIA

Mass media are also becoming a more influential socializing force. Mass media are forms of communication produced by a few people for consumption by the masses (discussed in more detail in Chapter 12). Unlike schools, the socialization function of mass media is more subtle, with much of it occurring unconsciously.

Historically, television was by far the most influential of the mass media. In 2005, 99 percent of all Canadian households had at least one colour television, and 27.6 percent had three or more (Statistics Canada, 2007a).

People over age 60 are the heaviest viewers, with men watching 31.1 hours per week and women watching 35.6 (Statistics Canada, 2006a). Research also shows that children from poor homes watch television more than those from affluent homes, minority populations watch more than white Canadians, and working- and lower-class children watch more than those whose parents have higher education and income (Nielsen Media Research, 1994, as cited in Lindsey & Beach, 2003, p. 111). Although television provides some reinforcement for prosocial behaviour (e.g., situations in which people help someone else without the motivation being personal gain), the majority of its content reinforces competition and the desire for financial wealth (consider such reality programs as *Survivor*, *Big Brother*, and *The Bachelor*).

Television defines and reinforces standards of behaviour, provides role models, and communicates expectations about all aspects of social life. However, as most of you would predict, the dominance of television is being replaced by the Internet. In 2010 Canadians spent more than 18 hours a week online, compared to 16.9 hours watching television (*Broadcaster*, 2010). The Internet today may be what the television was in the 1950s: a new and powerful influence on what we think about and how we define ourselves.

mass media Forms of communication produced by a few people for consumption by the masses.



Condemning Our Kids to a Life on Mars or Venus



Play Again

>>> Thinking Sociologically

American mass media are undoubtedly powerful socializing agents. How might postcolonial theory explain the influence of American media on contemporary social values?

11 Socialization across the Life Course

Sociologists tend to distinguish the socialization that occurs during childhood as *primary socialization* and socialization that occurs throughout one's adult life as the **life course** (Hetherington & Baltes, 1988; Kobali, 2004; Salari & Zhang, 2006). One way that sociologists track how events may influence people's lives is by analyzing a **birth cohort**, which encompasses all those who are born during a given period and therefore experience historical events at the same points in their lives. Investigating birth cohorts allows researchers to explain and predict how different groups respond to situations. For example, those who grew up during the Depression are often concerned with accumulating wealth and "saving for a rainy day." Their cohort's experience of living in poverty became one of the defining features of who they would become as adults. What is clear from research about aging is that what we think about particular "stages" of aging is socially constructed (Pietila & Hanna, 2011).

As we mature and develop, our experience guides us in making the many decisions we face every day. We understand that as we age, we change. Our personalities are not fixed; instead, they evolve as we experience more challenges and opportunities and learn from the decisions we have made in the past. The ability to change how we see both ourselves and the world around us is at the core of adult development (Atchley, 1999).

life course

Socialization that occurs throughout one's adult life.

birth cohort All of the people who are born during a given period of time and therefore experience historical events at the same points in their lives.

EARLY TO MIDDLE ADULthood

In Canada, we generally identify people around the age of 20 as young adults. The exception to this rule occurs when young adults continue their education beyond high school; in those

situations, the adult classification generally is not applied until these people have completed their education. Thus, young adults are generally defined as those who have completed school. They may be in a serious romantic relationship, raising young children, and working hard to establish their careers. Women who have children may choose to stay home to raise them. This can lead to considerable tension if their career aspirations are compromised as a result.

In 2009 there were 151 940 marriages in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2010a), but many people are marrying later or choosing not to marry at all (Kobali, 2004). According to the 2006 Canadian Census, for the first time ever there were more unmarried people (aged 15

>>> Thinking Sociologically

What social trends do you believe explain the fact that more Canadians are choosing to marry later or not at all?

and over) than legally married people. In fact, 51.5 percent of the population was unmarried (never married, divorced, separated, or widowed) compared to 49.9 percent five years earlier. This is a significant change from 20 years ago when only 38.6 percent of the population aged 15 and over was unmarried (Statistics Canada, 2007b).

Even so, marriage is one of the most important decisions an adult can make since it is usually the longest lasting and most emotionally charged relationship in one's life. Today, many traditional expectations of marriage have changed (e.g., most mothers work outside the home, there is greater social acceptance of same-sex marriages) and both married and live-in partners have greater flexibility in how they live their lives than ever before.

LATER ADULTHOOD

Later adulthood, generally between the ages of 40 and 60, is a time of increased focus on career achievement, children leaving home, the birth of grandchildren, and preparation for retirement. This phase of life also includes increased recognition of one's declining health as the first signs of physical aging occur (loss of hair, need for reading glasses, increase in aches and pains, etc.).

empty nest syndrome
The depression that some mothers experience when their children have left home.

During later adulthood, women are said to be more likely than men to become depressed as the last child leaves home, a situation often referred to as the **empty nest syndrome**. However, research suggests that this condition is largely a myth (Mitchell, 2010; Mitchell & Lovegreen, 2009). The majority of women in fact experience an *increase* in life satisfaction and psychological well-being when children leave the home (Harris, Ellicott, & Holmes, 1986). Further, more recent research suggests that retiring from work is a more difficult transition than having children leave home (Crowley, Hayslip, & Hobdy, 2003).

Men also face some significant challenges in later adulthood. During what is often referred to as a "mid-life crisis," men may experience both physical and emotional symptoms. Physical symptoms may include muscle stiffness and sore joints, night sweats, hair loss, and weight gain, while emotional symptoms may include irritability, loss of libido, erectile dysfunction, fatigue, and depression (Fielder, 2003). Often, the psychological and emotional turmoil associated with these symptoms is linked to hormonal changes, including a significant decline in testosterone levels (Brizendine, 2006). Because Western culture associates masculinity with sexual performance, the hormonal changes that may affect a middle-aged man's ability to achieve or maintain an erection can inspire a great deal of fear and anxiety. The popularity of drugs like Viagra and Cialis—whose estimated sales are almost \$2 billion annually (Koole, Noestlinger, & Colebunders, 2007)—which promise to enhance men's sexual performance, may be linked to this fear.

Still, adulthood is a period during which both men and women grow more confident in themselves and focus much of their attention on their family and careers. As middle adulthood transitions into later adulthood and then old age, many people begin to take stock of their lives and try to enjoy the fruits of their labours.

“OLD” AGE

The reason we have placed quotation marks around the word *old* is to highlight and challenge our culture’s traditionally negative view of the elderly (discussed in much more detail in Chapter 13). There are many different functional and chronological definitions of *old age*. A functional definition could, for example, include declining health or mental faculties as a result of the aging process. In Western societies like Canada, the definition of *old* is largely based on age and is not related to health status or physical abilities. This results in a fit, healthy 66-year-old who works full time and a frail 90-year-old who lives in a nursing home both being called “old” (Thompson, 2006).

The Canadian Old Age Pension (OAP) plan, introduced in 1927 for people over 70, and the Old Age Assistance (OAA) program, implemented in 1952 for Canadians aged 65–69, were **means-tested programs** (i.e., based on financial need) while Old Age Security (OAS), introduced in 1952 for Canadians over age 70, was a **universal plan** (Herbert Emery & Matheson, 2008). For many years, mandatory retirement at age 65 was the standard across the country. However, this practice has recently been challenged as constituting age discrimination that can no longer be justified since we are living longer and remaining healthier than we did when retirement legislation was introduced. Today, the majority of provinces and territories do not have mandatory retirement.

Canada’s population is getting older, as is the case for almost every other developed nation in the world. As of 2006, the median age for a Canadian was a record high of 38.8 years, compared to 38.5 a year before and 37.2 in 2001 (Statistics Canada, 2006b). This increasing median age means that the number of seniors is projected to grow from 4.2 million to 9.8 million between 2005 and 2036. As illustrated in Figure 4.1, people aged 65 and over accounted for 13.9 percent of the Canadian population in 2005, and this figure is expected to rise to 27.2 percent by 2056 (Statistics Canada, 2006b, 2009b). Statistics Canada estimates that seniors will outnumber children by 2015 and that by 2031 there will be 100 seniors for every 54 to 71 children (depending on different population growth scenarios) (Statistics Canada, 2005a, p. 45).

As the proportion of seniors in the Canadian population increases, the common stereotype of seniors as feeble and vulnerable may well lose currency. The socialization that occurs during late adulthood and old age is somewhat different than that occurring during earlier stages. The preceding life stages are marked by acquiring new responsibilities and taking on new challenges, whereas retirement and old age can entail a loss of identity and satisfaction when people retire from their careers and have grown children who no longer need their day-to-day support. Yet these transitions can also be liberating for aging people, as they are now free to pursue travel and other personal interests they may have deferred in favour of their families or careers (Brizendine, 2006). However, social isolation remains a concern for the elderly (Cloutier-Fisher, Kobayashi, & Smith, 2011). In short, late adulthood and old age involve both the learning of new roles and the unlearning of others, as well as preparation for the final stage of life.



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The proportion of Canadians aged 65 and older is expected to rise sharply over the next 50 years.

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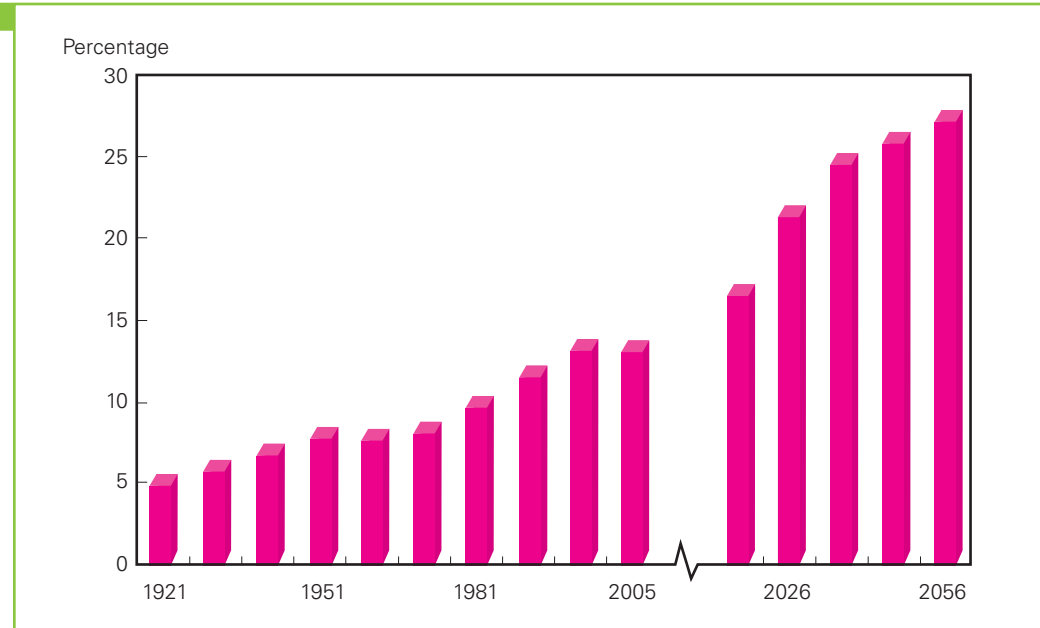
means-tested programs Social programs based on need.

universal plans Social programs provided to everyone.

FIGURE 4.1

Percentage of Canadian Population Comprising Persons Aged 65 or Older, 1921 to 2005, and Projections to 2056

Source: Statistics Canada. (2007). "Percentage of Canadian population comprised of persons aged 65 or older, 1921 to 2005 and projections to 2056", Statistics Canada, Censuses of Canada; Population projections for Canada, provinces and territories. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-519-x/2006001/c-g/4121787-eng.htm>. Reproduced and distributed on an "as is" basis with the permission of Statistics Canada.



gerontology The scientific study of old age and aging.

SOCIALIZATION INTO DYING AND DEATH

The final stage of one's life is associated with old age and the realization of approaching death. The scientific study of old age and aging is called **gerontology**. During late middle age, people usually confront their own declining health and the death of their parents, events that begin their own socialization into death. For the elderly, death becomes a fact of their everyday lives.

The process of dying has been studied through the pioneering research of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1926–2004). Through interviews with hundreds of terminally ill people, Kübler-Ross (1969) developed a series of stages that people go through as they deal with their own mortality. Just as there is a life course, there is a death course. The general sequence of stages is as follows:

1. *Denial*. People who are told that they have a terminal illness experience shock and disbelief. Aside from the personal horror of the news, in a death-denying society this is clearly a logical response.
2. *Anger*. Individuals express hostility and resentment, often toward others who will live on. "Why me?" they ask, with a strong sense of injustice.
3. *Bargaining*. Bargains are made, usually with God: "I will be a better person if only I can live, so please spare me."
4. *Depression*. With the realization that they cannot negotiate their way out of the situation, depression occurs. Sorrow, guilt, and shame are linked with this stage.
5. *Acceptance*. By discussing their feelings openly, people move into a final stage in which death is accepted. Kübler-Ross believed that only with acceptance can inner peace be reached.

dying trajectories The courses that dying takes in both social and psychological senses.

Kübler-Ross established the idea of **dying trajectories**, the courses that dying takes in both social and psychological senses. Her model has been used not only to describe the sequence of dying but also to suggest a set of overall therapeutic recommendations as to how dying "should" take place. Hospital staff are frequently taught to interpret terminally ill patients' behaviour according to the stage theory and to work with them so that they can accept their inevitable death. Symbolic interactionists suggest that such therapeutic recommendations socially construct the process of death; that is, the stage theory

becomes a prescription for reality (Charmaz, 1980, as cited in Lindsey & Beach, 2003, p. 108; Valentine, 2006, p. 60). Yet Kübler-Ross herself did not advocate such a position; in fact, she warned against the use of the model as a prescription for how we should die. Unfortunately, because the stages are so easy to learn and recognize, the biggest single mistake that many make is to use the model in a strict linear, sequential way (e.g., “It is good that Mr. X is depressed today because now he is making progress.”).

A contemporary social debate in the area of death and dying concerns euthanasia and assisted suicide (Ogden, Hamilton, & Whitcher, 2010). **Euthanasia** is the deliberate act by one or more persons to bring about a gentle or easier death to another, such as do-not-resuscitate orders for terminally ill patients in palliative care facilities (Brink, Smith, & Kitson, 2008). **Assisted suicide** is the act of intentionally killing oneself with help from others who provide the knowledge or means of death (Dickens, Boyle, & Ganzini, 2008, p. 72). For example, it is assisted suicide if a person injects poison into a willing recipient but it is also considered assisted suicide when a person only supplies the poison (Dyer, 2009, pp. 30–31). The right-to-die issue will continue to challenge contemporary Canadian society because of our aging population and our ongoing debate about personal rights and social mores.

As you can see, socialization into death is similar to other socialization experiences throughout the life course. Sociologists recognize that our entire lives are the result and expression of socialization and social interaction.

While our analysis of the life course corresponds to the vast majority of people’s lives, we turn now to a related but far more extreme and less common phenomenon in which people undergo a process known as resocialization.

euthanasia The deliberate ending of the life of a person who has an incurable or painful disease.

assisted suicide Intentionally killing oneself with help from others.

12 Resocialization: The Total Institution

Resocialization is the profound change or complete transformation of a person’s personality as a result of being placed in a situation or an environment dedicated to changing his or her previous identity (Parkinson & Drislane, 2007, p. 136). It generally occurs against one’s will and in a location where the person has little or no control over the situation. Classic examples of this type of resocialization occur in prisons or mental institutions, where the desired outcome is to change the way a person behaves. As a rule, resocialization usually occurs within what are called **total institutions**, settings in which people are isolated from society and supervised by an administrative staff.

Erving Goffman was a pioneer in studying the resocialization that occurs in total institutions. In his groundbreaking book *Asylums* (1961), Goffman outlines five types of total institutions:

1. Institutions that help people who are incapable of taking care of themselves and can be considered harmless (homes for the blind, the aged, the orphaned, and the indigent)
2. Institutions that take care of people who are incapable of looking after themselves and pose a threat to the community, albeit an unintended one (mental hospitals or institutions for those with communicable diseases)
3. Institutions that protect the community from those who would do it harm (prisons or prisoner-of-war camps)
4. Institutions that perform instrumental tasks that require unique work arrangements (army/work camps or boarding schools)
5. Institutions that act as retreats from the rest of the world and serve as locations for religious training (monasteries and convents) (Roberts, n.d.)

According to Goffman, total institutions are defined by three important characteristics. First, an administrative staff supervises all aspects of the inmates’ or residents’

resocialization The profound change or complete transformation of a person’s personality as a result of being placed in a situation or an environment dedicated to changing his or her previous identity.

total institution A setting in which people are isolated from society and supervised by an administrative staff.



Prisons are one type of *total institution*.

Greg Smith/Corbis



mortifications of the self The first stage of the resocialization process, in which a person's existing identity is stripped away.

lives, using electronic surveillance to observe their every move and action. Second, every activity is controlled and standardized so that formal schedules define everything that occurs (e.g., people exercise at the same time each day; every Tuesday is meatloaf day). Third, formal rules or policies define everything about the inmates' or residents' daily lives (Goffman, 1961).

Resocialization usually occurs in two distinct stages. In the first stage, people's existing identities are stripped from them in what Goffman (1961) termed **mortifications of the self**. To accomplish this separation from their past, inmates have all of their personal possessions taken away, they lose all control over their daily schedule, they often have to wear uniforms, they have their hair cut, and there is no real way to escape the organizational rules and procedures. In most of these settings, the institutional goal is to re-create the individual to fit the demands of the organization (Margolis & Rowe, n.d.). During this initial stage, inmates often feel anxious and worthless and have low self-esteem (Walsh, 2001).

In the second stage of the resocialization process, the administrative staff members build up inmates through a system of rewards and punishments. By breaking people down in the first stage and then building them up in the second stage, the resocialization process allows for the formation of a new identity that is distinct from the one that entered the total institution. In the case of a prison or a mental institution, one can appreciate why such drastic changes are necessary, but it is less clear why such a process was required for educating Aboriginal peoples in the residential schools. As we learned in Chapter 3 and as we will explore in more detail in Chapter 9, Canadian residential schools were a systematic attempt to resocialize Aboriginal children (Chrisjohn & Young, 1997; Milloy, 1999). By relocating children away from their families and having them under the guidance of schoolmasters who followed rigid daily schedules, the residential schools were arguably a state-sponsored total institution (Canadian Lawyers for International Human Rights, n.d.). Their purpose was to resocialize the children by forcing them to assume new roles, skills, and values. To achieve this, teachers controlled nearly every aspect of their students' lives (Llewellyn, 2002a).

As total institutions, Aboriginal residential schools imposed conditions of disconnection, degradation, and powerlessness on the student. The nature of these institutions permitted and even encouraged the abuse that commonly marked children's experiences (Llewellyn, 2002b, p. 257).

Clearly, this form of socialization is extreme, but it does reinforce the point we have been making throughout this chapter: The development of a sense of self is a dynamic process that influences us each and every day of our lives.

Summary

- 1 Culture—a complex collection of values, beliefs, behaviours, and material objects shared by a group and passed on from one generation to the next—possesses five defining features: it is learned, shared, transmitted, cumulative, and human.
- 2 Ethnocentrism is the tendency to perceive one's own culture as superior to all others; cultural relativism, in contrast, appreciates that all cultures have intrinsic worth.
- 3 Language, comprising a system of symbols having agreed-upon meanings shared by a group of people, can distinguish one culture from another; with the death of its language, a culture loses one of its survival mechanisms.
- 4 A subculture is a group that shares common attributes that distinguish it from the larger population; a counterculture is a type of subculture that opposes the widely held cultural patterns of the larger population.
- 5 Canadian culture has been defined by the country's vast and, in places, harsh physical environment, by the coexistence of and conflict between French and English, and by the primary and enduring differences between Canada and the United States.
- 6 Cultural change occurs through (1) discovery, when something previously unrecognized or understood is found to have social or cultural applications; (2) invention/innovation, when existing cultural items are manipulated or modified to produce something new and socially valuable; and (3) diffusion, when cultural items or practices are transmitted from one group to another.
- 7 Functionalists hold that cultural traditions develop and persist because they are adaptive and maintain stability. Conflict theorists, on the other hand, view cultural systems as a means of perpetuating social inequality, with the dominant culture assimilating less powerful cultures. Symbolic interactionists understand culture as being actively created and re-created through social interaction.
- 8 In the nature versus nurture debate, the "nature" argument holds that our genetic makeup determines much of our behaviour. The "nurture" argument, while appreciating the role that biology plays in some aspects of our behaviour, holds that socialization is a more important force in determining who we are. Some suggest that this simple binary between nature and nurture may be overly simplistic.
- 9 The sociological perspective holds that the self develops through social interaction in a series of stages.
- 10 The four principal agents of socialization that influence people's sense of self and help them to become functioning members of society are families, peers, education, and mass media.
- 11 Throughout the life course—from early and middle adulthood to late adulthood and old age to approaching death—adults face challenges that change how they see themselves and the world.

- 12 Resocialization and the profound change to the self that it brings is experienced by those forced into total institutions, such as homes for the aged, mental hospitals, prisons, and, arguably, the residential school system.

✓ Practice

Chapter 4 Glossary
Flashcards

Key Terms

agents of socialization 106
 assisted suicide 113
 birth cohort 109
 counterculture 96
 cultural adaptation 99
 cultural capital 107
 cultural relativism 94
 cultural universals 99
 culture 89
 culture shock 94
 diffusion 98
 discovery 98
 double consciousness 105
 dying trajectories 112
 empty nest syndrome 110
 ethnocentrism 93
 euthanasia 113
 folkways 93
 gender stereotyping 106
 generalized other 104
 gerontology 112
 hidden curriculum 108
 I 103
 invention/innovation 98
 language 94
 law 93
 life course 109
 linguistic determinism 95
 linguistic relativism 95
 mass media 109
 material culture 91
 me 103
 means-tested program 111
 micro-expressions 95
 mores 93
 mortifications of the self 114
 nature versus nurture 102
 nonmaterial culture 91
 norms 92
 peer groups 107
 personality 102
 primary socialization 105
 resocialization 113
 role-taking 104
 sanction 93
 Sapir-Whorf hypothesis 95
 secondary socialization 105
 self 103
 self-image 103
 significant others 104
 social interaction 102
 socialization 102
 socioeconomic status (SES) 106
 subculture 96
 symbol 94
 total institution 113
 universal plans 111
 values 92

Reviewing the Concepts

1. What are the five defining features of culture? In your opinion, which do you consider most important and why?
2. What are the similarities between linguistic determinism and linguistic relativism?
3. Review and discuss primary and secondary socialization. Be sure to use your own contemporary examples to demonstrate your command of the concepts.
4. What are the four agents of socialization? Which do you feel is the most important for explaining teenagers' behaviour? Defend your selection.

Applying Your Sociological Imagination

1. Using your sociological imagination, how might you explain the popularity of ultimate fighting?
2. In your opinion, are there any situations when ethnocentrism is good and cultural relativism is bad? Discuss using your own examples.
3. Using your sociological imagination, explore your own socialization. What were the most important factors that shaped the person you are today? Discuss.
4. Review Mead's concept of the *generalized other*. How might this concept apply to relationships between professors and students? The rich and the poor? The physically attractive?

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