

Chapter 5

Socialization

We learn how to interact effectively in society through socialization. Through the socialization process, we learn the norms and values that our society and socializing agents deem to be important. We also learn where we fit into our society and who we are as individuals. In order to become socialized, we must interact with other people. Of course, some of our interactions have more of an influence on our socialization process than do others. Those people who have the most influence over us are called *primary socializing agents*. Those who have some influence over us, but not as significantly, are called *secondary socializing agents*. In this chapter, we will look at how sociologists are using their knowledge of socialization to improve the experience of students taking international service trips, to create avenues of interaction between students and people who are homeless, and to improve interactions between youth and police. All of these are shining examples of how sociology can be used to help young people make society more just.

In “Socialization, Stereotypes, and Homelessness,” Michele Wakin relays some of the opportunities she gives students to interact with homeless Americans, such as a project through which they meet and interview homeless people. As Wakin notes, “Through participating in this project, students begin to question their own role in creating social change by becoming involved in the lives of others less fortunate than themselves.” Wakin also vividly describes the powerful impact on her students of participating in the annual Point-in-Time head count of homeless people in their surrounding community. Students come into direct contact with homeless women, men, and children living on the street (and in the woods) and in shelters. These interactions help “debunk the stereotypes associated with homelessness by tapping into the firsthand knowledge of people experiencing it” and spur many of her students to take action to curb homelessness.

Shelley White illustrates how discovering a missing element in the international service trip (IST) experiences at her college helped her and her colleagues realize why levels of activism were low on campus. In “Reengaging Activism in the Socialization of Undergraduate Students,” she describes how “service programs abound on this campus, while opportunities for learning about activism and structural change are sparse.” Examining the content of IST experiences, White and her colleagues “found that there, too, service was more reinforced than activism as an appropriate avenue for engagement.” She was able to use this finding to create opportunities for students to learn about the potential power of social action to effectively confront inequality. Her piece is a remarkably clear and inspiring example of fulfilling the core commitment of sociology: to use the sociological eye to notice social patterns and then to use the knowledge gained by sociological research to make a positive impact on society.

Susan Guarino-Ghezzi closes this chapter with “Dangerous Behaviors? Police Encounters With Juvenile Gang Offenders,” a dramatic illustration of how she used sociological tools to discover that police and juvenile offenders were each “locked . . . into routine, ritualized behaviors, guaranteeing that they would clash.” Her “goal was to uncover these patterns, expose untrue and misleading stereotypes, and to use these new understandings to change behaviors on both sides.” Guarino-Ghezzi shows how she fulfilled this goal, changed the norms of interactions between both groups, and made an important breakthrough in efforts to understand how juvenile crime can be reduced.

SOCIALIZATION, STEREOTYPES, AND HOMELESSNESS

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Sociologists view socialization as the process of developing an understanding of ourselves and our place in society through social interaction. Our socialization process also influences how we view various groups in our society. Socializing agents (such as our families, the media, and our peers) guide how we view different groups of people and lead us to judge members of these groups in certain ways. Homeless Americans are one group of people generally perceived as unable or unwilling to follow many of the dominant norms of our society (such as providing shelter for oneself, working hard, etc.).

Examining the accuracy of the prevailing view of homeless people requires critically exploring the stereotypes that surround homelessness. Stereotypes are used to describe categories of people who have not “made it” and often attribute to them negative characteristics. If we hold the general belief, for example, that homelessness can be avoided with enough hard work and perseverance, we also believe that an individual who is homeless is homeless by choice or because of personal failure. In other words, we tend to apply the stereotype *both* to the group as a whole *and* to each individual member of the group.

In order to illustrate how socialization and stereotypes work, I require students in my Homelessness in U.S. Society class to engage in two civic engagement projects. The first project is designed to bring students into direct contact with homeless people in order to challenge prevailing stereotypes, to examine people’s pathways into homelessness, and to explore resources needed to escape it. The second project includes both quantitative and qualitative components, as it involves a night count of homeless people and a series of interviews. Both parts of this project are designed to show students how different types of data can affect social policy.

In preparation for the first project, I ask students to close their eyes and picture a homeless person. The majority of the class generally pictures an older man with a scraggly beard pushing a shopping cart. I then ask them to write a brief description of this hypothetical man’s life. Most students imagine him having alcohol or drug problems and mental health issues. We then examine where these ideas about homeless people come from. Many students cite media images or individuals they have seen on the streets during trips to Boston or New York. It is a surprise for them to learn that the fastest growing segment of the homeless population is children and families (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009; Shinn & Weitzman, 1996). To illustrate how children are affected by unstable housing, we read the book *There Are No Children Here* (Kotlowitz, 1992), which details the lives of two children growing up with their family in the Henry Horner housing projects in Chicago. Although they are not homeless, growing up in housing projects where one’s home is not a safe place exposes these children

to various risks and illegal activities. This book illustrates the crucial role that housing plays in determining everyday opportunities as well as overall life chances. It also connects the idea of unequal access to resources with real-life examples of the struggle for survival in a low-income community. Given the impact that the current housing crisis has had on the number of homeless children and given the complex challenges they face, this is a particularly timely issue to discuss (Duffield & Lovell, 2008).

With this information as background, I arrange a field trip to a local emergency shelter, where my students tour the facility and meet with homeless people residing in the shelter. Prior to our visit, students write a series of questions that are distributed in advance. Some of the questions past students have asked include the following: Did you think you were going to be homeless when you were young? Do you have any family that you could turn to if you wanted help? Have you seen people's (family/friends/strangers/employers) view of you change since you became homeless? If yes, how?

Last semester, three homeless men and one homeless woman agreed to meet with us and answer our questions. Our discussion focused on domestic violence and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among veterans as pathways into homelessness. Students were surprised to hear that homelessness was not always a lifelong condition, but was often a temporary lack of housing due to tragic events. They were also surprised to hear that all but one of the people we spoke with remained in contact with their immediate family. The homeless individuals we met with spoke candidly about how difficult it is to be seen as homeless and said that it was not uncommon for former friends to turn their backs. They also indicated that limited access to resources such as training, education, and affordable housing were barriers to gaining employment, leaving the shelter, and becoming housed.

Overall, this activity broadens students' understanding of homelessness and awakens a desire to participate in community service activities. As student Amy Cavanaugh writes, "As a student in this course, my mind has been opened. Now I participate in as many community service and outreach programs as I can. I never understood the reality of homelessness before, [only what I saw in the news]." Student Britney Garfield also expresses a sense of social responsibility: "I now feel it is my responsibility to help those who are suffering from homelessness and pass on knowledge of their suffering and neglect to others." Through participating in this project, students begin to question their own role in creating social change by becoming involved in the lives of others less fortunate than themselves. After graduating, student Jillian Miceli went on to make this issue a part of her professional life by becoming the Program Coordinator for Horizons for Homeless Children, southeast region.

The second project corresponded with the annual Point-in-Time count of homeless people in Brockton, Massachusetts. The count is part of an annual funding application to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and is conducted nationwide by all communities receiving federal funding. The three basic components of the count are (1) an inventory of shelter beds available, (2) an inventory of those occupying the beds, and (3) a count of those who are unsheltered. The count occurs at night during the last week of January, when shelter usage is likely to be highest. Students from my course participate in the unsheltered count, which means spending several hours driving from location to location in search of unsheltered homeless people. Last year, there was a snowstorm on the night of the count, but to our surprise, we found a man sleeping in a tent behind a local mall. We made noise and yelled “hello” as we approached. The man came out of his tent, greeted us, and showed us the features of his living area. It was not only surprising to find someone camping out on such a cold night, but the man’s articulateness, patience, and candor also were illustrative of the injustice of many stereotypes about homeless people. Student John Kennedy was struck by what he saw: “This man was intelligent. He was a homeless veteran . . . and his world was the camp he had built in the woods and now he was just trying to survive with a little dignity.”

Students were also impressed with the idea that our count would shape the direction of future homeless services by offering a numerical estimate that could be used in comparison with other years and in demonstrating the need for additional housing and shelter. As senior Justin Mitchell wrote, “We spent as much time *making* social change, through the homeless count, as we did studying the social problem” (emphasis original). Student Dan Kent concurs:

The homeless count left an impact on me that made a semester of studying homelessness feel real and life-changing . . . the homeless count felt more real than anything I could have imagined. It was life beyond the textbook that most students will never see.

To assist students in further connecting their interest in homelessness with regional service provision and policy, I applied for a Community Action Research Initiative grant through the American Sociological Association. The grant required a partnership between college and community organizations and a focus on social justice. The purpose of the grant was to explore the feasibility of providing a qualitative component to the annual Point-in-Time count. Bridgewater State University students worked with local shelter providers and the Plymouth County Housing Alliance to

gather extensive demographic data on the local homeless population, an important preliminary step in identifying the parameters of our sample. Students were awarded work-study compensation and participated in an awareness training to prepare them to conduct qualitative interviews in Plymouth and Brockton. Each interview lasted approximately 15 minutes and explored factors leading up to homelessness, homeless services, and past and future housing alternatives. Each person who agreed to be interviewed received a \$10 gift card for his or her participation. We collected 39 interviews in all and presented our results at the annual conference of the National Alliance to End Homelessness and to the Plymouth County Housing Alliance.

In the future, we plan to include qualitative data as a regular feature of the Point-in-Time count and make our findings available for future funding requests to HUD and to the Massachusetts Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness. This experience was another way for students to connect their classroom learning with social policy and social inequality. Student Jason Desrosier sums up his experience this way: “The interviews were a unique and empowering experience in which the direct needs of homeless individuals were addressed. The interviews were an important step in the right direction to overcome homelessness and effect social change.”

Students participating in these projects as a feature of the course Homelessness in U.S. Society critically examined socialization and stereotypes using quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The interviews they conducted, as well as the shelter visit and Point-in-Time count, brought them into direct contact with homeless people in both shelter and street settings. This helped debunk the stereotypes associated with homelessness by tapping into the firsthand knowledge of people experiencing it. The demographic interviews built on the initial shelter visit and were an important addition to the street count. They allowed students to capture more detailed information on the personal backgrounds of homeless people, reasons they were without housing, and their most pressing service needs. Perhaps most importantly, these projects inspired students to become agents for social change and to use their newfound knowledge and methodological tools to work toward righting the wrongs of class inequality.

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REENGAGING ACTIVISM IN THE SOCIALIZATION OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

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Shelley White is Assistant Professor of Public Health at Worcester State University. She received her PhD in Sociology from Boston College and holds a master's degree in international public health. Shelley has worked in HIV/AIDS policy and programming with the Maine Department of Health and Human Services, and the Ministry of Health in Lesotho, Southern Africa. In addition, she works with several international organizations on action planning for social change, including Free The Children, the People's Health Movement, Me to We, and SocMed. Shelley teaches and has published on such topics as HIV/AIDS and public health, globalization and political economy, human rights, development, and social change.

My path into sociology began through a career in health care, and my orientation to activist scholarship was built gradually through years of service engagement. Each of these transitions was facilitated by powerful experiences that exposed me not just to the deep inequalities that exist in the world, but also to the political, economic, and social structures that continually reproduce these inequalities (such as immigration policy, global trade and lending policies, racism and discrimination, food and agricultural policies, corporate tax structures, etc.). I think I also made these transitions because key experiences and role models taught me that, indeed, one can make a positive impact on the world!

As an undergraduate student at Boston University, I traveled on an international service trip (IST) just over the U.S. border to Tijuana, Mexico.

Although my group was working only a few miles over the border, we were exposed to a whole new world just south of the United States. We lived and volunteered at a migrant shelter for youth, and though most of our work was physical—replacing a roof, building closets, doing demolition to create new bathrooms—I think the major work we came for was emotional and educational. We had the chance to meet young people separated from family members across the border by a harsh corrugated metal wall, struggling with poverty and bleak future prospects in their country, or escaping conditions of child labor and other abuses. We visited a variety of ad-hoc homeless migrant camps, shelters, social service programs, and even a street theater program for child prostitutes and children engaged in other night labor in service to U.S. tourists. While we learned about people's experiences, we also learned about the history of U.S.–Mexico border relations and various iterations of U.S. immigration policy.

For me, this particular experience was so personally transformative because, while we engaged in service, which felt meaningful and fulfilled critical needs, we also learned about the structural causes behind the conditions of poverty and inequality we observed, and we learned about efforts—past and ongoing—for taking action and making more permanent change on these issues. Our learning included dialogues with immigration activists who taught us about their powerful approaches to change making. For me, this IST experience began my own socialization process in understanding my connection to global issues as a U.S. citizen, and my responsibility to engage in informed action for social change.

Years later, after completing my master's degree in international public health, and working in health policy and programming in the United States and southern Africa, I decided to complete my PhD in sociology. I entered my doctoral studies at Boston College (BC) with a great cohort of students, many of whom were interested in understanding how sociology could lead to sustainable social change, and we came together to form a graduate student "public sociology collective." Although we were surrounded by amazing and inspirational public sociologists, we didn't have formal mechanisms for learning the theory and practice of public sociology. We approached our department's faculty in an open-forum meeting about our desire for more opportunities to learn about and practice public sociology, and they agreed to create a two-semester practicum course. Through the Public Sociology course, we read about and discussed concepts of activist scholarship and learned about how sociologists use sociological methods and perspectives to create structural social change. The other major piece of the course was a research project about civic engagement on our college campus.

In our dialogues about our own activist and scholar identities, and more broadly, the role of academic institutions in facilitating learning and

engagement for social change, we also turned our sights to undergraduate experiences of civic engagement at BC. We were struck by the social importance of ISTs on our campus; from conversations with undergraduates, we knew that students competed heartily to go on ISTs, and many seemed to speak about service trips as a sort of badge of honor. At the same time, given the types of experiences I and others in our collective had had on ISTs, we were surprised to learn that activism was quite stigmatized at BC. We heard from student activists that they felt marginalized on campus, several stating that the general student body seemed to consider activism a “dirty word.”

For the research project for our public sociology course, we decided to study the role of ISTs in shaping students’ understandings of service and activism, and their inclination to engage in either form of civic engagement upon return. We wondered what part ISTs, as a very visible and coveted form of service, were playing in contributing to students’ socialization around service and activism. We considered service to be an approach that fills an immediate need (i.e., feeding a person who is hungry), but does not upset existing power differentials between the server and the receiver and does not aim to solve the social problem. Activism, in contrast, aims to address the existing power differential and to resolve the social problem more permanently, usually at structural or policy levels. To explore this question, we completed interviews with participants from several recent ISTs, asking them about the IST, their reflections on social problems and solutions, and their thoughts on service and activism.

Our research revealed several findings. First, students seemed to return from ISTs with a deep sense of dissonance—that is, they were deeply moved by their experiences abroad, but this was coupled with great uncertainty about *what to do*. Second, based on their own definitions, students tended to uncritically valorize service as a mode of civic engagement, but expressed ambivalent and negative feelings about activism. When students were asked to define and compare the two forms of engagement, one theme that struck us was students’ reflections that service is ultimately a more *available* form of engagement than activism, and that even if students were interested in activism, they were not sure how to begin engaging in activist work (Cermak et al., 2007).

The latter finding, in particular, led us to what seemed a critical piece of the picture—students’ vague and negative conceptions of activism may be due at least in part to their lack of exposure to activism and its potential. While students did reflect on the importance of sustainable change in their discussions of social problems and solutions, they seemed quite uncertain of *how* one actually enacts structural solutions. Service programs abound on BC’s campus, while opportunities for learning about activism and structural change are sparse. In probing the content of ISTs, we found that there, too, service was the paradigm being reinforced as the appropriate avenue for engagement.

Our group presented the findings of our research multiple times on campus to many of our publics, including administrators of service trips and service programs. Fortunately, our findings were well received. Since then, we have been invited to run workshops on campus for two prominent service learning programs, in which we teach student-centered modules about the history, ideology, and tools of activism. Over the past several years since we completed our study, I have also consulted with the administrator who runs one of the college's largest IST programs. For this program, I now make a yearly presentation on globalization and the broad political and economic factors that help explain poverty and inequality today to all IST participants. These types of discussions and teaching opportunities use sociology to situate the social problems students observe internationally in a structural analysis, and include many examples of activist movements working toward change. As one student commented,

The lectures got our wheels turning on a lot of social issues. People came into this program with a desire for social change, social justice, and wanting to help people, but with really vague ideas and lacking direction. The pre-trip lectures were HUGE—they generated discussions and set the stage for what we saw on the trip.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this year, the large IST program implemented modules for action planning. All student leaders participated in a training module I designed about the steps for planning effective actions for social change. They then facilitated “solidarity projects” in which students translated their trip experience into an action following the trip. One group traveled to Guatemala and spent time with a small coffee-growing community of former guerillas. During their trip, they learned about Guatemala's civil war and the ongoing Truth Commission seeking justice for survivors of human rights atrocities. Upon return, they partnered with another local university to put together several events, including a documentary screening about this community and its struggles, a panel on Guatemala's human rights situation (which included student leaders as panelists), and events to support the local coffee production of this community. Another group visited Mexico and learned about Mayan traditions of community gardening and has since engaged in a Real Food movement on campus, supporting community and organic farming movements. A third group visited El Salvador and commemorated the 20-year anniversary of Archbishop Oscar Romero's assassination with a panel event that included Massachusetts Representative Jim McGovern. In the 1990s, McGovern helped expose the ties between the United States and the members of El Salvador's military responsible for murdering Jesuit priests in 1989, and

led the effort to cut U.S. aid to the country's military and bring about peace accords. Representative McGovern's example of activism was instructive, on this anniversary, of the power of global political mobilization.

Not all of the solidarity projects were activist in nature: Some raised funds; many raised awareness; and some campaigned for structural change. However, what the projects provided almost universally was an avenue through which students could avoid feelings of dissonance and translate their newfound passion about social issues into tangible actions with tangible results. According to one student leader,

I was so excited to empower my participants to come up with a project and follow through. . . . It took a lot of time and effort, but it was 150% worth it! This is what it's all about. What's the point of going on a trip, raising \$2500 to travel, if we don't *do something* about the social issues we've observed? (emphasis original)

Students learned concrete skills as they planned, problem solved, and ultimately carried out successful events—skills that should stay with them in their journey forward as change makers. The incorporation of action planning adds an important social change element to the socialization process students go through during their IST experience.

One of the gifts that sociology has brought to me is that of a broadened lens, one that has allowed me to understand the importance of both serving people's immediate needs and working to change the conditions that perpetuate their need. This broadened analysis began with my own IST experience many years ago, a journey that was infused with sociological analysis and that has guided my scholarship and activism since. Having had the opportunity to bring sociological analysis and activist learning into IST programming at BC in recent years has been an amazing experience, one that I hope will create an opening for students to understand their potential to effect positive social change in the world today. These experiences have reinforced for me that informed activism is a real skill, one that must be learned and imparted. They have also helped me to realize that teaching activist skills is tremendously rewarding and important, and at the very heart of the core commitment of sociology.

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DANGEROUS BEHAVIORS? POLICE ENCOUNTERS WITH JUVENILE GANG OFFENDERS

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Susan Guarino-Ghezzi is a professor of sociology and criminology at Stonehill College. She is the former Director of Research of the Massachusetts Department of Youth Services, and is a frequent consultant on juvenile crime. She was principal investigator for research projects on juvenile sex offenders, ex-offender reintegration, deinstitutionalization, and staff-youth interactions. Her work has been cited by Amnesty International, the U.S. Department of Justice, and the PBS program *Frontline*. Professor Guarino-Ghezzi is coauthor of the books *Balancing Juvenile Justice* (2nd ed., 2005, with Edward Loughran) and *Understanding Crime: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (2006, with A. Javier Treviño). She has a PhD in sociology from Boston College.

If [people] define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.

—W. I. Thomas

W. I. Thomas was a sociologist who studied groups of immigrants who came to the United States during the early 1900s. Thomas wrote about communities and their moral codes of conduct, not as expressions of individual morality, but as sets of behavior norms that develop over time through repeated social interaction. Using insight into the power that social groups have on individuals, Thomas uncovered the fact that people respond not only to the *objective* features of a situation (what is real), but also to the *meaning* that the situation has for them. Furthermore, once we define situations in a certain way, our actions are often based on those definitions.

The meanings of situations are often shaped by social environments—including political structures, the economy, communities, social institutions like schools and the legal system, family, and peers. The discipline of

criminology, which studies crime and the control of crime, is grounded in several disciplines, but primarily sociology. As a criminologist trained in the discipline of sociology, I believe that societies, subcultures, and social groups affect the individual offender, victim, and law enforcer, through definitions of social norms.

In the 1990s, I conducted research in Boston on two groups of people—police and gang-involved male juvenile offenders held at the Massachusetts Department of Youth Services (DYS). I was interested in how each group defined encounters with one another. My observations began when crime and policing were at a very critical stage in Boston. Juvenile homicides were at a record high, mostly due to gangs in inner-city neighborhoods that were competing for territory related to crack dealing. Police and juveniles were each frustrated by the relentless violence and record homicide rate, and they blamed one another for the situation. Within both groups were subcultures that reinforced myths and stereotypes. These myths were perceived as “real” and locked each group into routine, ritualized behaviors, guaranteeing that they would clash.

My goal was to uncover these patterns, expose untrue and misleading stereotypes, and use these new understandings to change behaviors on both sides. In related research involving a survey of 100 juvenile offenders (Guarino-Ghezzi & Kimball, 1996), my coauthor and I found that about two thirds were highly alienated from police, based on their responses to such questions as, “Would you go to the police if you believed your life was in danger?” I also found that the recidivism, or the rearrest, rate for youths who were highly alienated from police was 52%, compared with 28% for other youths—nearly twice as high.

One of my students at Stonehill College and I analyzed the data further, and we found that alienation from police was very strongly correlated with alienation from adults in general (Guarino-Ghezzi & Carr, 1996). We found that the youths who were the most alienated from police had the most frequent encounters with them. Negative encounters with police were at the center of their lives, ironically, because of the lives they chose. They could have avoided such unpleasant interactions by going to school or work, rather than hanging out in groups on the street. We found this to be a frequent contradiction, and came to realize that while the offenders claimed to hate police, they actually looked forward to negative confrontations as opportunities to reinforce peer bonds. When I suggested to DYS residents that I could arrange meetings with police in DYS facilities, they loved the idea.

At the same time, I learned that police painted ex–juvenile offenders with the same brush. If a juvenile offender returned to the community after a long program of rehabilitation, regardless of his or her willingness

to reform, the individual was still a juvenile offender as far as the police were concerned. And if a juvenile offender became a victim of crime, the police showed less sympathy than if the juvenile were a law-abiding victim. When I asked what the Boston Police Academy was doing to prepare police recruits for encounters with juveniles on the street, I received a copy of the police academy's 26-week curriculum and was stunned to see only a few hours on juvenile crime, with no training on communication skills or adolescent development nor on the background of juvenile offenders. I realized that police were unaware how patterns of their behavior, such as mixed messages and overt stereotyping, were used by youths to justify increases in law-breaking, escalated youths' defiance toward police, and resulted in more arrests (Guarino-Ghezzi, 1994).

I contacted the deputy superintendent of the experimental neighborhood policing district in Boston (who, incidentally, had recently completed a degree in sociology at Boston College) and shared my concerns. He invited me to meet with two of his most progressive officers, who added to my observations. After several meetings, we all agreed that things needed to change.

Together, we established a program called Make Peace With Police (MPWP), which arranged communications sessions, role-plays, and other nonconfrontational encounters between police and gang-involved juveniles. As executive director, I oversaw 41 group meetings run by MPWP facilitators on a weekly basis. The groups ran from April 1995 until January 1997 and involved 70 youths and 35 police officers. The youths were part of ongoing programs in DYS, while the officers were assigned to attend the sessions as paid details. The officers usually rotated, with some electing to attend more than once. Pretest and posttest evaluation instruments were given to the youths and pretests to the officers, some of whom were then interviewed following the sessions. In addition, detailed notes of the group meetings were taken by students and later transcribed. These sessions helped us to understand the sources of hostility on both sides, but more importantly, they helped to create useful dialogue between juveniles and police.

In one session, a young gang member broke down in tears and said over and over, "The police have to squash the beef." This boy feared retaliation from other gang members but felt powerless to do anything about it. He believed that only the police could help him, but that the police didn't care enough about him to help. At the end of another session, a young man reminded two officers that they had met him before—in jail. They had stopped to talk to him while he was in a police lockup and gave heartfelt advice about how he was leading his life, and after our session he thanked them sincerely.

A key finding of the Make Peace With Police project was that without sincere efforts to establish relationships, juveniles lacking positive social

bonds learn to define police negatively from their social environments. While some of the most defiant and hostile-seeming youths were biased against police based on their peer subcultures, our sessions became turning points for developing positive relationships. In one meeting, we brought in three officers, including a female named Officer Smith, to meet with about six kids. As usual, the participants were seated in a circle. The kids usually had their guard up, but this time, one of the kids outright refused to participate and he turned his chair to face outside of the circle. Officer Smith wasted no time moving her chair parallel to his. He sat there, arms folded, looking straight ahead. She began to smile and gently tease him, and started to poke him, saying that she was going to keep this up until she could get him to smile. After a few minutes he eventually smiled, then grinned, and then turned his chair back into the circle, to the amazement of everyone except for Officer Smith!

Similarly, police told us that they were surprised to learn that young gang members were really “just kids.” An officer who arrived at a session feeling tough and somewhat angry at the youths quickly attached to a youth during the session who was visibly upset when mentioning a death in his family. The officer offered to help the youth find a job when he was released from the DYS facility. When asked what made him change, the officer explained that he had no idea how young and vulnerable the youths were because he’d never looked beyond the street-tough exteriors that were so common among groups of youths in high-crime communities.

Another officer told us about a DYS youth who went home on a weekend pass. The officer and the youth had met several times in Make Peace With Police sessions held at the youth’s DYS program. The officer received a surprise that weekend when the youth recognized him in his cruiser and went out of his way to initiate a pleasant conversation. It was especially fulfilling because the boy was one of a small number who refused to even speak to police in his first Make Peace With Police session. The communication sessions provided a necessary bridge for redefining social norms. Both sides came to admit that negative police encounters with juvenile offenders can actually lead to *more* crime, not less.

We presented our work to scholarly audiences in the form of journal articles (e.g., Guarino-Ghezzi & Carr, 1996), and my colleagues and I incorporated the feedback given by our academic peers as we prepared materials for a police audience. The Boston Police Department published our booklet *Make Peace With Police: Myths and Rituals* (Godfrey, Guarino-Ghezzi, & Bankowski, 1997), which summarized our project findings and recommendations and became the basis for building effective communication skills in the Boston Police Academy. The booklet detailed how some of the long-term hostilities were rooted in simple miscommunications and how others were more complex.

In the end, I was deeply gratified because so many naysayers had warned us not to bring police and juvenile offenders together, predicting that the sessions would fail miserably or grow violent. I learned that police officers and juvenile offenders did not necessarily want to battle one another but felt pressured to do so by their social circumstances. Our sessions were able to initiate a change in social norms by altering those circumstances. They also reminded me, once again, that sociological tools can be used to make a positive impact on society.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Many of Michele Wakin's students had never interacted with homeless people before. How did their doing so in her class impact their perceptions of homeless Americans? Why do you think these interactions had such an influence on them?
2. Can you think of a group of Americans who have relatively little power (like homeless Americans) with whom you have never interacted? Why or why not? How do you think your interacting with such a group might influence your opinion of them? Would you be willing to "step outside your comfort zone" like some of Wakin's students did and participate in such an interaction? Why or why not?
3. Discuss the difference between service work and social activism that Shelley White describes. Which do you feel more comfortable carrying out? Why? How has *your* socialization process influenced this? Which has the potential to make more of an impact on society, service or activism? Why?
4. White describes the international service trip that she took as an undergraduate as "personally transformative." Why did it have such a major impact on her? Have you participated in a similarly transformative experience in high school or college? If so, what was it—and why was it transformative for you? How, if at all, did it challenge the way you view the world and your place in it? If you have not participated in a similar experience, why do you think that is?

Does it offer any insight into your own socialization experience that you have not yet participated in such a trip?

5. Were you at all surprised by the research findings Susan Guarino-Ghezzi discovered before she began her Make Peace With Police program? If yes, which ones—and why? If not, why not?
6. How does the Make Peace With Police program illustrate how social norms can be changed by altering social circumstances? Describe how changing social circumstances at your school might lead to a positive change in social norms (pick an issue you care about where you believe change is needed).
7. Each of the pieces in this chapter describes, in some way, the power of socialization. However, many Americans like to believe that they are not influenced by others. Pretend you are a Sociologist in Action who is confronted by people who do not believe that their behavior can be influenced by those with whom they interact. How might you use these articles to try to convince them of the influence of socialization?
8. Both Wakin's and White's pieces show how college experiences can impact a person's attitude toward social activism. Imagine you are advising a college president who believes it is the responsibility of higher education to help students become knowledgeable, effective participants in our democratic nation. How would you use these two articles to help make the case for both curricular and extracurricular efforts to promote social activism on college campuses?

RESOURCES

The following Web sites will help you to further explore the topics discussed in this chapter:

Introduction to Sociology/Socialization	http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Introduction_to_Sociology/Socialization
PBS: Nature vs. Nurture Revisited	http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/body/nature-versus-nurture-revisited.html
<i>Socialization and the Self</i> , by Richard T. Schaeffer (2010)	https://globalsociology.pbworks.com/w/page/14711256/Socialization%20And%20The%20Self

To find more resources on the topics covered in this chapter, please go to the Sociologists in Action Web site at www.sagepub.com/korgensia2e.