

# Resocialization and Total Institutions

by Sophia Tutorial



## WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial will cover the following topic of sociology, through the definition and discussion of:

1. Resocialization and Total Institutions

## 1. RESOCIALIZATION AND TOTAL INSTITUTIONS

There is a different aspect of socialization called resocialization. **Resocialization** occurs when you want to eradicate all of your past behaviors, ideas, thoughts, and sense of self and become resocialized into someone new, different, and more amenable to society.

Resocialization is typically done in what is known as **total institutions**, which include institutions like the military, boot camps, prison, jails, mental hospitals, boarding schools, and boot camps.

A total institution is one that is set apart from the rest of society and in which individuals are controlled, monitored, and ideally shaped by an administrative staff.



## THINK ABOUT IT

What makes total institutions such fascinating sociological studies? There are formal rules that dictate all aspects of life and everything is supervised. Inmates and enlistees are always under the gaze of their superiors, and they're told the appropriate time to eat, sleep, shower, use the bathroom, etc. Every bodily function that you take for granted is rule bound and monitored. You can imagine what that would do to your psychology.

## IN CONTEXT

In total institutions, life is completely standardized. Given that people are all subject to the same rules in these institutions, they all have the same standard experience. When you get to jail or join the military and arrive at boot camp, you're stripped, given a standard uniform, and sometimes your hair is even shaved, like in the military. You wear the same, standard uniform as everyone else and it doesn't matter if you were a lawyer or a homeless person in the outside world, because in the institution, everyone operates by the same rules. Any outside 'status' is gone. The first goal of the total institution is to simply strip you of your former self and identity. The purpose of resocialization is to give you a new way to look at the world and a new identity, and that only occurs by first breaking you down and getting rid of everything that made you, you in the outside world. In the total

institution, you live by a new set of rules.

Once your initial identity is broken down, you can be built back up with subtle little rewards that encourage conformity to the authority in the total institution. Something as simple as making a phone call to your boyfriend or girlfriend--anything you might take for granted--is an immense pleasure inside of the cold, harsh environment of the total institution. When the authority is kind enough to give you that phone call, you're going to cherish it, and you're going to conform because you want another phone call. You conform and create your new way of being, your new identity, your resocialization--the fundamental change that occurs in the controlled environment.

🔗 **EXAMPLE** In the military, for example, you're no longer Josh from Wyoming or Mallory from Nevada. You're a maggot or whatever name they choose to give you. You're not unique. You're not special. That's the first step of resocialization, to break down your former identity and to fashion a new one.



#### BIG IDEA

Bottom line, the process of resocialization in total institution works, given the profound psychological distress that an individual goes through when they undergo a complete erasure of self.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### Resocialization

The attempt to fundamentally change a person's, typically and inmate's or an enlistee's, ingrained personality by carefully controlling the environment.

##### Total Institution

An institution set apart from the rest of society in which individuals are controlled, monitored, and shaped by an administrative staff.



#### SUMMARY

Today you learned about a process called **resocialization** that occurs in **total institutions**.

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Zach Lamb.



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