The Cycle of Socialization helps us understand that oppression is a very complex issue. While it is important to appreciate differences based upon gender, ethnicity, skin color, first language, age, ability status, religion, sexual orientation, and economic class—simply recognizing differences and treating everyone with respect will not undo the effects of generations of oppression. The Cycle of Socialization points out that we are socialized into roles of power or powerlessness, dominance or subordinance. We are socialized to “act like girls” or “not to cry like a man” or “not to associate with them.” We learn that our way is “superior” and their way is “inferior.”

The socialization process is pervasive—it comes from all sides and sources. Every institution in which we participate helps shape our views. We attend a church with people who are like us in many ways and people who believe the same things that we believe. We attend schools that have rules, policies, and written and unwritten codes of conduct and acceptance. Our lives are filled with reinforcement of what is considered “normal.”

The socialization process is consistent—patterned and predictable. That is, we perpetuate the same patterns and ideas that are reinforced in all of the various institutions in which we are socialized—family, church, neighborhood, school, community organizations, etc.

The socialization process is circular—self-supporting. History repeats itself. Individuals who are born into (or who find a way into) institutions of power inherit positions of dominance, while individuals who are born into (or find a way into) institutions of powerlessness inherit positions of subordinance. The cycle repeats itself over and over, generation after generation.

The socialization process is self-perpetuating—it is intradependent. Those who are dominant garner their power from and exercise it over the powerless. They live out their roles often without thought of the privilege they enjoy. Those who are subordinate also participate in this intradependent cycle by living out the roles into which they are socialized. Thus the cycle is also invisible—it goes on unnamed and is often perpetuated unconsciously.
Writing Assignment

Study the Cycle of Socialization and its explanation.
Write a 600-word essay describing, in detail, your own Socialization Process.
Consider and address the following questions:

1. What is the situation into which you were born (describe in detail your family status, neighborhood, belief system, tradition etc.)?
2. Who were the first people who participated in your socialization (how did they shape your self-concept, your understanding of others, your understanding of the norms or rules, your ability to dream and hope)?
3. What are the institutions that you participated in – school, place of worship, medical facility, sports teams, businesses your family patronized, community clubs or organizations? What were the identities and beliefs of the people in these institutions? How did your participation in them shape your views and values?
4. How would you describe the result of all of the above? Did you experience feelings of anger, dissonance, self-hatred, guilt, stress, low self-esteem, high self-esteem, hopelessness, hopefulness, fear, unearned privilege, payback, ignorance of others?
5. How can you change your own cycle? What can you do differently to ensure that you are not participating in the cycle of oppression, or living out the views and values that perpetuate oppression – your own or the oppression of others?