

Culture, Gender, and Identity

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss the different factors that contribute to identity and the way in which identity often plays a role in conflict. The particular areas of focus include:

1. Sense of Self and Construction of Identity
2. Role of Identity in Conflict

1. Sense of Self and Construction of Identity

Personal identity, or the sense of self, comes from a variety of factors, such as:

- Culture
- Gender
- Personal experience
- Where we grew up
- When we grew up
- Groups we belong to
- Relationships we form

All of these are going to have a bearing on how we define ourselves.

IN CONTEXT

Several generations of Americans have now grown up in the post-9/11 era. People remember 9/11 and where they were when it happened. Likewise, there are people who remember when Pearl Harbor was bombed. That was an experience that shaped and bonded them as a group.

Or perhaps you've heard talk of "The Greatest Generation," those who grew up during World War II or the Depression. There are people who grew up during the '60s and went through the Civil Rights Movement, the Women's Movement, and the Vietnam War. Living during an era like any of these creates a bond among a group based on the way that people have come to see the world and identify themselves. Their identity was shaped during the era they grew up in.

Then, there are the groups that we belong to. These could be worship groups, social groups, or political

groups. If there's a cause we believe in, we identify with that group and its purpose, as well as with the people who are in that group.

The relationships in our life, not only with the people in our groups, but with those in our families and the larger community are very important to our **identity**.

The roles we play in our lives are also important; we all wear a variety of hats. We play a role at home, at work, and in the community.

We identify ourselves in great part through these roles, and gender has a hand in this. We have ideas about what it means to be masculine or feminine, male or female, and even ideas about the roles that we play based on gender.



BIG IDEA

How deeply we hold our beliefs about what our different roles are, and how we identify with those roles go into shaping our sense of identity.



TERM TO KNOW

Identity

A person's sense of self; the way an individual defines himself

2. Role of Identity in Conflict

Our sense of identity really influences the way we behave in conflict because all the factors that go into making up our identity may cause us to develop a sense of how little or how much power we have.

We may feel like we are in control of our destiny, that we can shape things in our world. Or we may take a more fatalist approach and feel as though the cards are stacked against us.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Rita is a new student at a high school. She comes from a family of community organizers and has joined them in several community meetings. When her new school implemented a change that limited the types of lunch options, Rita's classmates were frustrated. As she listened to her peers, Rita could tell that some felt helpless while others were trying to figure out what to do. Since Rita was raised to advocate for herself and others, she had a sense of power and formed a group to address the issue with her principal and the school board.

That's just one way that our identity, and the experiences that have gone into shaping our personal sense of self, will influence us in conflict.

Whether we identify more with our rights as an individual or feel as though it's more important to sustain a relationship also plays a part in conflict.

➞ **EXAMPLE** If you feel like it's a dog-eat-dog world, then you may take a more competitive approach to dealing with conflict. But if you feel it's really important to sustain relationships, you may collaborate, or engage in dialogue as a way of approaching conflict.

The importance of these relationships themselves can determine our approach. We may feel we have a sense of self that allows us to be assertive and speak up, or we might feel as though we need to be accommodating.

Gender roles could be at play in these types of situations.

IN CONTEXT

Some women may feel that they want to nurture or accommodate others, while some men may feel that they want to be competitive. These more traditional gender roles certainly don't apply to every individual, but they do influence our sense of self to some degree.

A threat to the sense of self can also lead to a conflict situation.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Toni is a software engineer at a nonprofit and feels her work aligns closely with her sense of self and values. She is proud that she has overcome many stereotypes and obstacles of women in her field. If she loses her job, or if she feels threatened because somebody she considers less deserving than her got a promotion, this loss can lead to conflict.

How you deal with that conflict will depend on your experiences, and whether your sense of self prepares you to engage in a more collaborative approach that gives you the power to work through the situation and make a change.



BIG IDEA

There are many variables in terms of how we approach conflict that all come back to our sense of identity. That sense of identity is formed through culture, gender, and any number of other factors.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that your **sense of self and construction of identity** come from a variety of factors, such as culture, gender, and where and when you grew up. The roles you play and the relationships you form in life are also crucial to your identity. You now understand the **role of identity in conflict**. Your sense of self, and the experiences that created that sense of self, will determine how you respond to conflict. If you feel as though your sense of identity gives you the power to make a positive change, you may be able to take a more collaborative approach. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.



TERMS TO KNOW

Identity

A person's sense of self; the way an individual defines himself.