

Identity and Conflict

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll look at how identity can often become a source of conflict by discussing:

1. Construction of Identity
2. In-group and Out-group
3. Negative Assumptions About Identity

1. Construction of Identity

Identity is a person's sense of self, or how a person defines himself or herself; there are many factors that go into our self definition.

Some common factors include:

- Race and ethnicity
- Family of origin
- Where we grew up
- Religion
- Cultural context
- Gender and sexuality
- Experience in school
- Influence of peer groups

How we respond to situations, particularly those involving conflict, is influenced by this sense of identity.

➦ **EXAMPLE** You have probably heard people say things like, "I wasn't raised to act like that," or "That's not the way we do things around here." Phrases like these reflect that people are identifying specific behaviors with particular groups.

When we identify ourselves as members of a certain group, this influences the way we might behave towards other people that aren't part of that group.



THINK ABOUT IT

What are some of the ways that you define yourself? What are the major components of your identity?



Identity

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

2. In-group and Out-group

Sociologists interpret social group behavior through the formation of in-groups and out-groups.

The **in-group** is a group in which a given person is a member. In everyday life, we all define ourselves as members of an in-group. These groups can include:

- A nuclear family
- A friend group
- Members of a religion or church
- Fans of a sports team
- People who engage in a particular hobby
- Residents of a given neighborhood

We feel like we share certain values with others who are part of the same group, and we may behave in a certain way because we are all part of that group.

The **out-group**, however, is the group in which a given person does not define himself or herself as a member. Depending on how you define yourself, the out-group could be:

- Those who are not family
- Those who are not in the friend group
- People of a different religion or church
- Fans of a different sports team, or who don't follow sports at all
- People who do not engage in the particular hobby
- Residents of different neighborhoods

The in-group is in part defined by the out-group—being in the in-group means you are not in the out-group, and vice versa. Sometimes, there can be a sense of animosity or rivalry between these groups. Sometimes, it is a neutral designation.

➞ **EXAMPLE** The band kids at school are an in-group who primarily socialize with each other. They are cliquish and not welcoming to members of the out-group, their classmates who are not in band.



In-Group

The group in which a given person defines himself or herself as a member.

Out-Group

The group in which a given person does not define himself or herself as a member.

3. Negative Assumptions About Identity

Conflict can arise when people have negative assumptions about or use labels to describe those in a group outside of theirs.

➡ **EXAMPLE** The band kids we just described were an in-group, and the classmates who weren't in band were an out-group. Conflict between these groups could arise if the band kids started making assumptions about the non-band kids, calling them jocks or assuming that they didn't know or care about music.

➡ **EXAMPLE** Racism is frequently characterized by in-group and out-group dynamics, wherein members of one racial group, an in-group, perceive out-group members of other racial groups with bias, stereotype, and hostility. It can also occur that the in-group is defined by the out-group in instances of racism, such as the racist in-group members identifying themselves as simply not being the out-group race or ethnicity that they are biased against. For instance, anti-Black racism in the United States could be considered a form of in-group / out-group hostility wherein the in-group is "non-Black people who are biased against Black people," and the out-group is Black people.



THINK ABOUT IT

Consider the factors that define your personal identity:

- What are your in-groups?
- Have you ever been in conflict with someone from a different group?
- If so, what caused this conflict, and how was it resolved?



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned how our **identities are constructed** based on the factors that influenced us as we were growing up, the way we see ourselves, and the groups that we belong to (in-groups).

You now know that issues can arise when we see ourselves as distinct from another group (out-group), and then apply **negative assumptions about identity** to that group. Awareness of this can help us better understand how identity plays a role in conflict. 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 or herself.

In-Group

The group in which a given person defines herself or himself as a member.

Out-Group

The group in which a given person does not define himself or herself as a member.