

In-Groups, Out-Groups, and Social Identity Theory

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll return to our discussion of in-groups and out-groups by looking at them in relation to Social Identity Theory. The particular areas of focus include:

1. Groups and Social Identity Theory
2. Intergroup Comparison
3. Personal Identity and Group Norms

1. Groups and Social Identity Theory

We all have an **identity**, or sense of self, that we use to define who we are. There are a number of factors that can contribute to the formation of our identities.

However, the two main factors are:

- Personal experience
- Group experience

Personal experiences are unique to each individual; group experiences relate to the perceptions of others and how they act around and think about us.

Both personal and group experiences help shape who we are and how we think about ourselves.

Social Identity Theory is a theory stating that the portion of our sense of self that comes from groups can be reinforced the more we follow the norms and rules of whatever group we belong to.

As you learned in an earlier lesson, the groups we belong to are called **in-groups**. They contribute to how we define ourselves through an interest, goal, or value.

Our groups will have certain ways of doing things. The more we ascribe to those views, the more our sense of identity is derived from that in-group.

The **out-group**, on the other hand, is the group with which we do not identify ourselves as members.



TERMS TO KNOW

Identity

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

Social Identity Theory

A theory dealing with how individuals and groups develop a sense of identity and relate to other groups in terms of their sense of identity, evaluating the in-group in terms of the out-group.

In-Group

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

Out-Group

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

2. Intergroup Comparison

The stronger our adherence to the norms and rules of our in-group, the more likely it is that we will compare that group to other groups.

This is because as human beings, we all want to have a good level of self-esteem; we want to feel good about ourselves.

If a large portion of our identity is coming from groups, then we're going to want to feel good about the groups we belong to, and thus the way we behave and the rules and norms we follow.

We may then see our ways of doing things as better than the ways people in other groups do things. This intergroup comparison can lead to discrimination, which is one way that conflict can happen.

Because we're identifying with our groups, we see our groups as superior to other groups with which we don't identify.

In this way, Social Identity Theory can help explain attribution bias, or this tendency to give more positive traits to our in-group and more negative traits to the out-group.

Attribution bias is not Social Identity Theory; Social Identity Theory simply states that part of our identity comes from groups. It is because of that **identification** that attribution bias occurs.



TERM TO KNOW

Identification

A person's sense of belonging to and drawing part of his identity from a group.

3. Personal Identity and Group Norms

As mentioned earlier, a portion of our identities do come from personal experiences. These are our own traits, the things that we like, or the way we are when we're by ourselves or relating individually to people we're close to.

While some people have a very strong sense of personal identity, reinforcing most of who they are through personal traits, most people are constantly trying to find a balance between the group and the personal.

Our sense of identity comes from both, and the more strongly we reinforce our group norms, the more strongly we identify with the group.



BIG IDEA

Social Identity Theory makes us aware of the fact that we have a tendency to compare groups. Because we want to feel good about ourselves and our groups, we tend to give positive traits to our in-groups. However, thinking that groups we aren't part of are inferior to groups we are part of can lead to intergroup discrimination, and thus conflict.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about the connection between **groups and Social Identity Theory**. Social Identity Theory explains that while some of our identity comes from personal experience, a portion of our identity comes from the groups that we see ourselves as members of. You now understand that because we tend to attribute positive traits to in-groups, or groups we are part of, there is also the tendency to attribute negative traits to out-groups, or groups we are not part of. This attribution bias is related to **intergroup comparison**, which occurs when we compare other groups to our own in terms of superiority. Although **personal identity and group norms** both contribute to our overall sense of self, the more strongly we ascribe to our group's norms, the more strongly we derive a portion of our identity from that group. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.



TERMS TO KNOW

Identification

A person's sense of belonging to and drawing part of his identity from a group.

Identity

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

In-Group

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

Out-Group

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

Social Identity Theory

A theory dealing with how individuals and groups develop a sense of identity and relate to other groups in terms of their sense of identity, evaluating the in-group in terms of the out-group.