

Inequalities in Patterns of Interaction

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial will cover several forms of group interaction in society, through the definition and discussion of:

1. Segregation
2. Assimilation
3. Pluralism

1. SEGREGATION

Different groups often have a hard time coexisting with each other, which can be observed in many societies. These groups can either fight with each other or come up with a way to exist together peacefully. How do they do this? There are various ways that groups interact.

Segregation is the physical and social separation of a person or group from the main of society. Segregation can be voluntary or involuntary--even forced.

🔗 **EXAMPLE** If you sit with people like you at the lunch table where you attend school, this is voluntary segregation on a micro level.

Segregation can be involuntary and law-bound. In past U.S. history, for instance, black people and white people went to separate schools--"separate but equal" was the law. Similarly, they went to different restaurants and occupied different social spaces, different areas of buses, etc. Now segregation is not law-bound in American society; it has been abolished. Yet it still happens because of custom, whereby people want to only be around people who are like themselves, even though there are no laws mandating it.

IN CONTEXT

Some forms of segregation are so extreme and law-bound that they are qualitatively different. **Apartheid** is a system of extreme segregation enforced by law.

The term originated through the persistence of apartheid in South Africa from 1948 to 1994, when South African society was divided into four racial groups. People were forcibly segregated and divided by law.

The term has currently taken on a broader meaning and is applied to situations of law-bound segregation, beyond its origin in South African apartheid.

Often what underlies extreme segregation is the hatred of one group by another, or animosity between groups. This can cause violence, and in some cases, extreme forms of violence can result, like genocide. **Genocide** is an extreme form of racism where one group systematically kills members of another group.



TERMS TO KNOW

Segregation

When groups are kept apart from each other.

Apartheid

An extreme form of segregation that is encoded in law.

Genocide

The mass killing of one group of people by another group of people.

2. ASSIMILATION

In contrast to segregation, which is a divisive form of social interaction, is **assimilation**, a more cohesive form of social interaction. Assimilation occurs when minority groups abandon their cultural traditions and adopt the traditions of the majority group. This can be forced or voluntary, in the same way that segregation can be forced or voluntary.



EXAMPLE Forced assimilation took place in the 19th century in American society with Native American groups. Native American children were systematically rounded up and sent to boarding schools where they were to become 'Americanized.'

Assimilation can be voluntary as well. Immigrant groups might want to assimilate into the dominant American culture so that they can establish themselves quicker and easier.



DID YOU KNOW

Conformity to white norms has historically been the dominant form of assimilation in American society. The highest level of assimilation is sometimes thought to be achieved when interracial marriages and interracial mating is proportionate to the rest of the population. Interracial mating, in particular with respect to the offspring of interracial marriages, is known as the process of **miscegenation**, or racial mixing.



TERMS TO KNOW

Assimilation

When people of a minority group abandon their cultural traditions and adopt the cultural traditions of the dominant majority.

Miscegenation

Race Mixing between people, especially with respect to offspring.

3. PLURALISM

A third way that groups can interact in society is pluralism. **Pluralism** occurs when groups maintain their uniqueness and cultural practices but are nonetheless united under an umbrella of civic society or as a polity.



BRAINSTORM

It has been said that the U.S. has pluralistic elements. Can you think of different cultural or ethnic pockets in society that show pluralistic characteristics? These would be groups that aren't segregated, yet they don't assimilate, and they are united under an umbrella of America.



TERM TO KNOW

Pluralism

A situation in which unique cultural traditions are upheld, but people are united under the umbrella of civic society or polity.



SUMMARY

Today you learned about various forms of group interaction, including **segregation**, **assimilation**, and **pluralism**.

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



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