

Exposure to conflict

[Sociology](#), [Identity](#)



Exposure to conflict can weaken a person's sense of self. In this world we are often exposed to elements of conflict with other people and this can sometimes have a negative effect on our identity and sense of belonging. As social creatures, we need to belong because we develop an understanding of ourselves through our relationships with others. When these associations are threatened we can be bereft of an invaluable opportunity for identity formation. However there are instances where conflict can have the converse effect, in that it can actually strengthen a person's sense of self. Accordingly, the effects of conflict are twofold and in both cases, conflict is a crucial component in the process of self construal. Humans need to belong amongst others in order to develop a sense of their own identity. Like many other mammals, we are social animals and what is true of them is true of us. Animal psychologist Konrad Lorenz said "one chimpanzee is no chimpanzee" and likewise, human beings need the motivation of other humans in order to achieve their full potential. In the twelfth century, a number of babies were kept in total privacy to enable some researchers to determine whether they would acquire language of their own agreement, and, if so, what language they would obtain. The disastrous consequence was that the children that were raised quickly died, thus demonstrating the extreme extent to which we require connectivity with others. As expressed throughout 'Growing Up Asian in Australia' migrants particularly need a sense of affiliation with others who share their culture in order to strengthen their identity. Hop Dac expresses how his family ethos is ingrained in his own sense of self. In saying that he "was brought up in the belief that any good Vietnamese family was a self-sustaining one" he illustrates how being raised in a familiar culture can

help construct and strengthen one's system of beliefs. Joo In Chew's "Chinese Dancing Bendigo", also documents the importance of heritage and family in developing one's identity. She tells the reader, "I joined the [Chinese] association, and my sister and I put our names down to learn 'Chinese dancing'". By joining Asian societies or groups, Joo In Chew is able to achieve a better sense of belonging, and resultantly, a stronger self esteem. As such, it is imperative for people to find belonging since it strengthens their identity and without it they may experience the detrimental consequences of isolation. Conflict with other people threatens this sense of belonging and as such when your relationships with others suffer so does your sense of self. When there is a significant difference of ideals, beliefs, or interests, it can jeopardise an individual's ability to assimilate with the group. Factors such as language barriers, cultural barriers, appearance and one's socio-economic status are just some of the many reasons why people may find themselves in conflict with wider society. According to Dennis Gilbert, professor of Sociology at Hamilton College, some of the people who are classified as members of the 'Underclass' struggle to live a happy and normal life because they belong to a minority group which suffers discrimination in the work force, due to their low income, low employability and lack of education. Thus this discrimination undoubtedly attributes to an obscured self image which subsequently affects their quality of life. On some occasions, moving from one society into another can make it difficult for people like immigrants to belong, because they often struggle to find a sense of self-identity. They also might not fit in because of cultural differences and different societal expectations. Simon Tong's "The Beat of a Different Drum"

documents the cultural shock of finding oneself in an Australian classroom, knowing little English and having no understanding of the culture. Tong notes how he quickly becomes an object of mockery, a “ new animal at the zoo”, surrounded by intimidating boys. He later goes on to say “ If I couldn’t express myself, then who was my self? ” and as such Tong’s victimisation clearly has a negative effect on his sense of self, as he does not feel a sense of belonging, instead, feeling like an outsider. Consequently, being exposed to conflict, such as discrimination, can leave individuals feeling ostracised and questioning their innate character. Conversely, conflict can also strengthen a person’s sense of self. All types of relationships can be considered either ‘ we’ or ‘ me versus them’. The ‘ we’ category emphasises cooperation and as a result, self identity becomes defined by mutual identity due to circumstance. The people involved in this classification of relationship are often striving towards a common goal, and although they may have differences, such as discrepancy of thought, there is a focus on similarities. Whereas the second entails opposition in some form, whether it be war or competing for a job or even a particular seat on the bus. In this case, there is an emphasis on differences and one defines a sense of self in opposition to another individual. Sometimes not belonging or getting along with other people can make you feel even more confident of who you are because you know you're not like 'them'. Growing Up Asian in Australia also illustrates some of the instances where the multi-cultural conflicts experienced by some of the characters cause them to become even more committed to their original culture and sense of self. Diem Vo’s “ family life” portrays how migrants like her Vietnamese parents who don’t know English, turn away

from their adopted country's society and withdraw into their own insular language community because they believe that is more important and "easier to deal with other Vietnamese-Australians than to learn English". Therefore sometimes finding yourself in conflict with others can provide you with greater resolve regarding your obstinate pursuit of self. Being exposed to conflict more often than not weakens an individuals' sense of self but it can at times also fortify their identity. Conflict such as having a considerable amount of difference of ideals, interests or beliefs can endanger a person's ability to comprehend with a group, but clashes such as competing for a job or even a seat on the bus can build up a person's identity.