

Social Identity Paper

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For this paper, you will write an essay about your own social identity and the social identity of a member of a different social group. The goal is to focus on an identity that is central to *your* self-concept. To begin, choose an identity that is central to your self-concept, such as “White male” or “Latina female.” The identity you choose must be a *social* identity and should not be just a readily accessible label. Then, find a person with a different identity and interview him or her. This person *cannot* be a member of our class or someone who took this course previously. This paper is worth 35 points and should be 9-10 pages long.

This paper is, in part, a personal story and, in part, an analysis based on the social science literature. That is, you will write about your experiences and those of a person with a different social identity. Your paper will focus on comparing and contrasting your experiences with those of another person who is different from you in an important way. In addition, a central part of this assignment is your ability to link these experiences to social identity theory (SIT). It also may be helpful to consider how group privilege affects your experiences and those of your interviewee. Again, although we cover many other theories in the course, *this paper is about SIT and that theory, along with group privilege*, should be your focus and should be addressed in detail, not just in a couple of paragraphs. Do not use other theories for this paper.

Success on this paper stems from choosing a good fit between the interviewee and the assignment goals. I highly recommend you focus on a central identity, such as gender, race/ethnicity, disability status, national origin, or sexual orientation. Although other identities may be very important to you (such as religious or political affiliation, sorority or fraternity membership, or athlete), students who choose one of those identities often find that the person they interview either doesn’t have a similarly strong identity or, not having taken the class, has difficulty understanding the questions. This makes it very difficult for your interviewee to respond to your questions. For example, you might identify as a “student,” but it probably would be difficult to find someone whose “non-student” role is central to her/his identity. Also, your identity should be “opposite” of the person you interview (e.g., male/female; gay/straight) if possible. Finally, choose someone you will learn something about. Don’t choose a person who you already know very well (for example, your best friend or life partner) unless you truly believe the answers to these questions will be “new” to you.

Below are the questions you should address for yourself and for the person you interview. Keep in mind that you might need to define “social identity” for the person you are interviewing.

1. What is your social identity?
2. Do you see your identity as positive or negative? Does society see your identity as positive or negative?
3. Think about your identity in various situations. When are you likely to behave in certain ways because of your identity? When is your behavior likely to be due to your identity? When is it unlikely to be so (e.g., is due instead to situational factors or other aspects of yourself)?



4. What kinds of things might threaten your social identity? (You may have to explain what we psychologists mean by this.)

5. How does your identity influence your interactions with others? Think about the expectations you have and the expectancies others bring to the situation. To what extent does this stem from social structure?

6. To what extent do you take your identity for granted (or not)?



Guidelines for your paper:

- a. Answer the questions about yourself, too. Be sure to compare and contrast your answers with your interviewee's. The best papers do this for each question separately.
- b. Address elements of social identity theory where relevant throughout your paper. Be sure to *explain* how that aspect of the theory does or does not apply. Just mentioning the theory is not sufficient. Also, summarizing theory at the beginning or end of your paper is *not* integration.
- c. Many students find it easier to focus on the required elements of this paper if they use headings, at the very least for integration with social identity theory and for insights gained from the paper. You might also use a heading for each interview question, but that is less important.
- d. Write a separate section about the insights you gained from the interview and this paper. This should be a minimum of 1 full page. These insights should not just summarize the interview.
- e. Look at the grading rubric to be sure you have covered all required aspects of the paper, including the requirement that you followed informed consent procedures and documented that the interview actually took place.

Notes about the interview. The person you are interviewing should be a) made aware of the purpose of the interview; b) informed about how you will handle the confidentiality of the information they provide; and c) told in advance whether or not you plan to tape the interview and, if so, what will happen to that recording once the project is completed. (Good options are to give that person the tape or to destroy it.) You must provide *written evidence* that these issues were addressed. One possibility is to have the interviewee complete a consent form that outlines the goals of the paper; this can be done by email. (See below for an example informed consent.) If the person wishes to remain anonymous, s/he may use a pseudonym on the consent form. It would be a nice gesture to provide your interviewee with a copy of your paper.

You also must document that you actually interviewed this person. This documentation could be in the form of notes taken during the interview (including start and stop time for the interview) or an audio or videotape of the interview. These should be turned in with your paper.

Page Length and Formatting. Take the page requirement seriously. If your paper is not at least 9 pages long (double spaced), you probably a) did not do an in depth enough interview; b) did not adequately cover social identity theory; and/or c) did not provide insights about your experience in enough detail.

Notes about confidentiality. Please consider carefully what information you want to disclose about yourself and your interviewee. *You are never obligated to disclose personal information that you don't want to or that would be inappropriate in a class assignment.* However, the more you strive to be honest, the more likely it is that you'll discover something new and potentially meaningful. *You have the right to privacy and I expect you to display appropriate personal boundaries* (i.e., to be honest but to avoid disclosing excessively). The same goes for the person you interview. Please be assured that I will regard these papers as *confidential*.



Informed Consent

This interview is a class project for the Psychology of Prejudice and Discrimination (PSYS 325). I am asking you to volunteer 1 hour of your time for an interview about you and your group membership.

There is no risk in participating in this interview. The benefits include helping me enhance my understanding of other social groups. Should you begin this interview but decide not to continue, simply tell me and I will end the interview. That is, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice from me or the course instructor. If you request it, I will refer to you by a pseudonym in the paper. You also may decline to answer any questions you wish. Any tape that is made of this session is done at your consent and will be destroyed when my paper is completed.

I, _____, agree to participate in this interview. I have had its purpose explained to me and any questions I had were answered to my satisfaction.

Signed

Persons with additional questions may contact the course instructor, listed below:

ADD INSTRUCTOR AND CONTACT INFORMATION

