

SOCIAL GROUP

What is a Social Group?

A social group is two or more humans who interact with one another, share similar characteristics, and collectively have a sense of unity.

A social group exhibits some degree of social cohesion and is more than a simple collection or aggregate of individuals, such as people waiting at a bus stop or people waiting in a line. Characteristics shared by members of a group may include interests, values, representations, ethnic or social background, and kinship ties.

One way of determining if a collection of people can be considered a group is if individuals who belong to that collection use the self-referent pronoun “we;” using “we” to refer to a collection of people often implies that the collection thinks of itself as a group. Examples of groups include: families, companies, circles of friends, clubs, local chapters of fraternities and sororities, and local religious congregations.

Types of Social Group?

Sociologists have classified groups into numerous categories according to their own ways of looking at them. Some of the important classifications have been discussed below:

1. Primary Group and Secondary Group (*Concepts introduced by C.H Cooley in his book Social Organization*)
2. In-group and Out-group (*Introduced by W.G Sumner in his book Folkways*)
3. Reference Group (Introduced by Muzafer Sherif but used extensively by Sociologist Merton)

Primary Group: A primary group is typically a small social group whose members share close, personal, enduring relationships. These groups are marked by concern for one another, shared activities and culture, and long periods of time spent together. The goal of primary groups is actually the relationships themselves rather than achieving some other purpose. Families and close friends are examples of primary groups.

Secondary Group: Secondary groups are large groups whose relationships are impersonal and goal oriented. People in a secondary group interact on a less personal level than in a primary group, and their relationships are generally temporary rather than long lasting. Some secondary groups may last for many years, though most are short term. Such groups also begin and end with very little significance in the lives of the people involved. Secondary relationships involve weak emotional ties and little personal knowledge of one another. In contrast to primary groups, secondary groups don't have the goal of maintaining and developing the relationships themselves.

In-group: In-groups are social groups to which an individual feels he or she belongs. The groups with which individual identifies himself are his in group. One's family, one's college are example of his in group.

Out-group: Out groups refers to those groups with which individual do not identify himself. These are outside groups. Pakistan is an out group for Indians.

Reference group: A reference group refers to a group to which an individual or another group is compared. Sociologists call any group that individuals use as a standard for evaluating themselves and their own behaviour a reference group.

Reference groups are used in order to evaluate and determine the nature of a given individual or other group's characteristics and sociological attributes. It is the group to which the individual relates or aspires to relate himself or herself psychologically. Reference groups become the individual's frame of reference and source for ordering his or her experiences, perceptions, cognition, and ideas of self. It is important for determining a person's self-identity, attitudes, and social ties. These groups become the basis of reference in making comparisons or contrasts and in evaluating one's appearance and performance.

Robert K. Merton hypothesized that individuals compare themselves with reference groups of people who occupy the social role to which the individual aspires. Reference groups act as a frame of reference to which people always refer to evaluate their achievements, their role

performance, aspirations and ambitions. A reference group can either be from a membership group or non-membership group.

(This material has been sourced from):

<https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-sociology/chapter/types-of-social-groups/>

Students can also access this video by clicking on the link below to know more about Social Groups. This video is in Hindi.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=oa-KJni5RTY>