

# In-Group/Out-Group: Relationships and Attitudes

by Sophia Tutorial



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll take a closer look at the concept of in-groups and out-groups and how it can lead to conflict. The particular areas of focus include:

1. In-Groups and Out-Groups
2. Attribution Bias
3. In-Groups and Out-Groups in Conflict

## 1. In-Groups and Out-Groups

As humans, we all belong to groups, and these groups influence our relationships and attitudes. Sometimes this influence is subtle, and other times less so.

Anytime we find ourselves as part of a group, whether it be because of a common interest, value, or goal, we see ourselves as more **similar** to the people in that group than to those outside of it.

Groups that we are part of are called in-groups, and we perceive ourselves as “like” the other people in these groups.

Conversely, out-groups are groups comprised of people who are not part of our groups, and thus who we perceive ourselves as different from or **dissimilar** to.

In groups based around a common interest, similarities and differences/dissimilarities often present themselves in more minor ways.

🔗 **EXAMPLE** Let's say you really like to garden. You belong to a gardening club, and you see the others in that club as similar to you in the sense that they share the same hobby. This is an in-group, and people who don't like to garden are not part of this group. There likely isn't any animosity toward those people, just a sense of being different from them in this particular way.



## TERMS TO KNOW

### Similarity

A perception that members of your in-group are more like you than members of your out-group.

## Difference/Dissimilarity

A perception that things are not like each other; a perception that members of an out-group are not like members of an in-group in some meaningful way.

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## 2. Attribution Bias

There are instances in which the concept of similarities and dissimilarities can lead to some tension.

This usually occurs in instances involving **attribution bias**, which is a term referring to the tendency to attribute more positive traits to in-groups, and more negative traits to out-groups.

Attribution bias occurs because we identify with our in-groups; we like to think positively about ourselves and our groups, so we give our groups positive traits.

This type of bias can occur in any number of circumstances, and even be based on relatively minor things.

### IN CONTEXT

In the United States, people who live on the East and West Coasts might tend to think that's where everything happens. Thus they have certain perceptions of the Midwest as being less exciting; you may have heard the expression “fly-over territory” in reference to the Midwest. But if you live in the Midwest, you might view it in a different way: “In New York, they're all too fast-paced. In the Midwest, we have strong values. We build character, and we stick together.”

The tendency for people to give positive traits to the groups they belong to, and negative traits to groups they don't belong to has also happened over the years with immigrants who come to the United States. When they come to the country, they're not seen as part of our in-group. They may be different in terms of cultural aspects, such as religion, food, or music. If people in the United States differ in those areas of culture, they may start to think in terms of “us” and “them.”

Attribution bias can occur anywhere and among any group, from kids in school to adults in the workplace.



### TERM TO KNOW

#### Attribution Bias

A tendency to assign more positive traits to members of one's own group and to assign more negative traits to non-members.

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## 3. In-Groups and Out-Groups in Conflict

Many times, attribution bias will lead to conflict because the stronger the identification we have with any particular group, the more we're going to see that group as positive.

Thus, the more identity we obtain from this group, the more negative we're going to view the out-group.

## IN CONTEXT

You can see this happening in the United States. There is certainly a minor attribution bias that occurs concerning the regional differences mentioned earlier. However, once you begin talking about political parties, there can be very strong feelings attached on both sides. People may assume that if you live in a certain state that's either red or blue, you feel a certain way about particular issues.

The stronger you feel about your political identification, the stronger you are going to be in favor of your own group, and the more negatively you're going to view the other group. On a global level, countries who see each other negatively in terms of their values can end up in a conflict so severe that it results in war.

Conflict starts with these types of perceptions about another group. The more negatively one group sees another, the more likely it is that conflict will erupt.

This is the same concept of in-groups and out-groups; only at this point, the tensions have escalated to an extreme because of the perceptions that people in one group have about the other group.



### BIG IDEA

We all belong to groups, and we see ourselves as similar to people who are in our group. This is natural and doesn't have to be a bad thing; we simply bond with people with whom we have common interests. However, the more strongly we begin identifying with our in-group, the easier it is to see the out-group as negative, and the more likely it is that conflict will emerge.



### SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned more about **in-groups and out-groups**. In-groups are groups that we identify ourselves as members of, and out-groups are groups that we don't identify ourselves as members of. We have a sense of similarity to people in our in-groups, and a sense of dissimilarity to people outside of those groups. You now understand that our tendency to attribute positive traits to groups we are part of, and negative traits to groups we are not part of is called **attribution bias**. This bias can present itself over minor issues that don't result in animosity, or it can present itself in a larger manner. The more strongly we identify with our in-groups, the stronger our attribution bias will be. It is more likely that **in-groups and out-groups can find themselves in conflict** when the negative traits attributed to the out-group are more extreme. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.



### TERMS TO KNOW

#### Attribution Bias

A tendency to assign more positive traits to members of one's own group and to assign more negative traits to non-members.

**Difference/Dissimilarity**

A perception that things are not like each other; a perception that members of an out-group are not like members of an in-group in some meaningful way.

**Similarity**

A perception that members of your in-group are more like you than members of your out-group.