

Why and How Do Humans Group?

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss the natural need of human beings to form groups. In particular, we'll focus on:

1. Ways of Forming Groups
2. In-Groups and Out-Groups
3. Groups in Conflict
 - a. Between Groups
 - b. Within a Group

1. Ways of Forming Groups

As human beings, we need to be in groups in order to survive. While there are some species that can live on their own, most organize themselves into groups.

IN CONTEXT

Think about common groups of animals. Lions are in prides, wolves are in packs, and there are even families of birds. Primates, who are the closest to us in terms of evolution, form social groups that are quite similar to ours. Like these animals, it's ingrained in us as humans that we need each other to survive.

We form groups around certain shared things, and the primary group we belong to is family. Many people maintain those family ties and bonds throughout their lives.

The next three things around which we form groups are:

- **Values:** The group might be faith based, or it could be a cause you support, something that's very important to you. When you're around others who share that value, you feel like you're part of that group because of that similarity.
- **Goals:** The goal could be professional; there are a lot of professional organizations people belong to because they share a particular professional aspiration. The goal could also be personal, such as something fitness-related. You might join an exercise group at your local gym.
- **Interests:** When you have particular interests, you feel like you're part of a group when you spend time

with other people who share those interests. Maybe you love yoga or you're a long distance runner. Everybody who runs a marathon with you is part of your group.

When we find we have **shared interests/goals/values** with others, we tend to form a group. When you think about the groups you belong to, they are probably based around either one or all of these things.



TERM TO KNOW

Shared Interests/Goals/Values

An interest/goal/value shared to some degree by members of a group.

2. In-Groups and Out-Groups

We tend to feel that we are more similar to people in groups who do the same things we do than we are to those who are not in those groups.

Groups can provide this sense of **similarity** even if we haven't met the other people in the group.

➦ **EXAMPLE** There are a number of groups that function solely online. One of these is made up of people who are looking for coupons. They have organized themselves into a group and share tips on how to find and use coupons. They have a name for themselves, and they feel this similarity with one another. They probably don't know everybody in the group, but there's that sense that they are alike in terms of their interest.

This sense of similarity could come from anything; everyone has experienced this feeling at one time or another.

➦ **EXAMPLE** Think of the high school you went to. When you meet somebody who graduated from that high school, you identify with that person. Or when you cheer for a particular sports team, you don't know everybody in the stadium cheering with you, but you're part of the same group.

If we feel that we have this similarity with people who share an interest, goal, or value that means we also feel dissimilar from people who don't share that interest, goal, or value.

This is the beginning of in-groups and out-groups. As you may remember from an earlier lesson, **their-group** is any group that we define ourselves as being part of. We feel like we're similar to people in that group because of a shared interest/goal/value.

The **out-group** is the group of people who do not share that same interest/goal/value. However, that doesn't necessarily mean there is any animosity towards this group.

Rather, the in-group is just the sense that there's an "us." If we define ourselves as part of this group, this is us. If there's an us, there has to be a "them."

➦ **EXAMPLE** This starts early. When kids go to school, they form different groups based around interests. There's the debate team, the football team, the band, perhaps a science group. There can also be peer pressure as a result, which shows just how powerful groups sometimes are. People begin to form these bonds at a very young age.



TERMS TO KNOW

Similarity

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

In-Groups

Groups in which a given person defines herself or himself as a member.

Out-Groups

Groups in which a given person does not define himself or herself.

3. Groups in Conflict

3a. Between Groups

The fact that there are in-groups and out-groups, and this sense of similarity and dissimilarity can sometimes lead to conflict between groups.

➦ **EXAMPLE** This often happens politically. There can be real tension between someone who identifies as a Republican and someone who identifies as a Democrat.

There is also a more mild form of tension that can build between groups.

➦ **EXAMPLE** Say you're a cyclist, and you like to commute to work on your bike everyday. You know several people who do not commute on their bikes and instead drive cars to work. There might be a little bit of tension between those who are driving cars and those who are riding bikes. This tension can be a result of safety, use of bike lanes, the environment, or a combination of factors.

3b. Within a Group

There can even be tensions within a group.

➦ **EXAMPLE** If you are a vegetarian, you have certain interests, goals, and values around food, and you may share those with other vegetarians. But there might be some people who are a little bit more strict, such as vegans. This can result in an argument about what it really means to eat in this particular style.

Or there might be conflict around the reasons why people have chosen a vegetarian diet. Perhaps you are a vegetarian because you want to limit your carbon footprint, while someone else is a vegetarian because they care about animal welfare; even though you ultimately are choosing the same diet, you are choosing it for very different reasons, and thus might experience conflict.

There might not necessarily be a large amount of animosity, but just a little bit of conflict.

➦ **EXAMPLE** You are part of a group supporting a specific cause, and you're working together with other people in this group towards a shared goal. But somebody is not quite pulling his or her weight; this person is not participating in the way that you or others think he or she should be. This can cause conflict.



BIG IDEA

As human beings, we have a need to form groups, and it's important to understand how we come to identify ourselves with others based on family or shared interests/goals/values. It's very easy to see others as outside of our groups, and that interplay can at times lead to conflict. However, conflicts can erupt not only between

an in-group and an out-group, but within a group as well.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that as human beings, we have **ways of forming groups** with one another. We tend to form groups primarily around family, and then around the interests, goals, or values that we share with others. You now understand that because we feel this sense of similarity with people in our particular groups, and dissimilarity with people outside of those groups, the result is that there are **in-groups and out-groups**. In-groups are the groups that we identify ourselves as members of, and out-groups are the groups that we don't consider ourselves members of. Because of these differences, **groups can find themselves in conflict** when there is a disagreement over a particular interest, goal, or value. Conflict can occur within groups as well, and it's important to be aware of this possibility. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.



TERMS TO KNOW

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Shared Interests/Goals/Values

An interest/goal/value shared to some degree by members of a group.

Similarity

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