

**Module 10: Social Psychology**  
**Topic 3 Content: Factors Affecting Prejudice**

**Introduction**

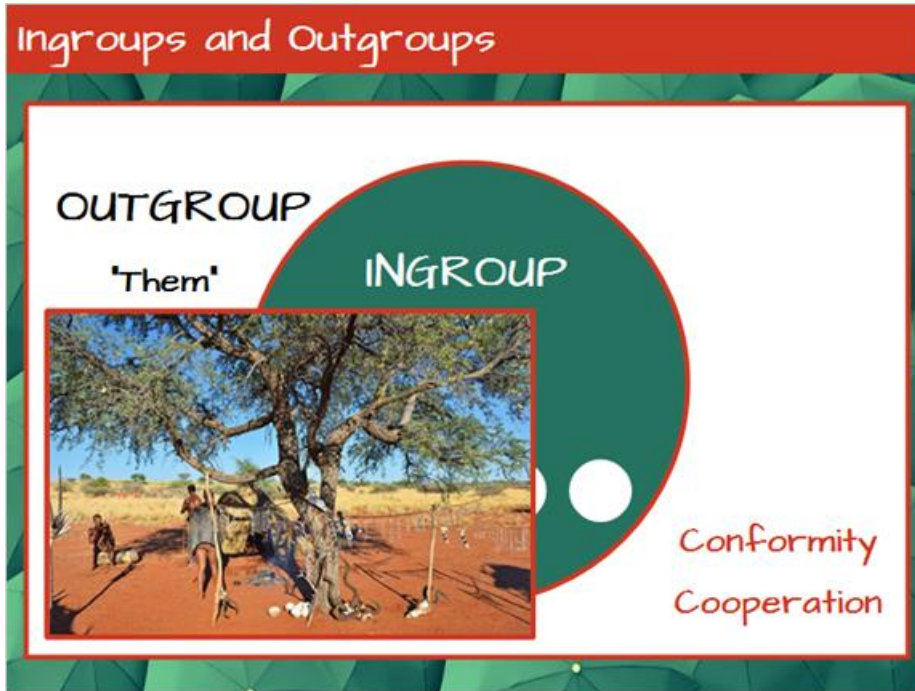


Click the **NEXT** button to learn about social, emotional, and cognitive factors that affect prejudice.

# Module 10: Social Psychology

## Topic 3 Content: Factors Affecting Prejudice

### Ingroups and Outgroups

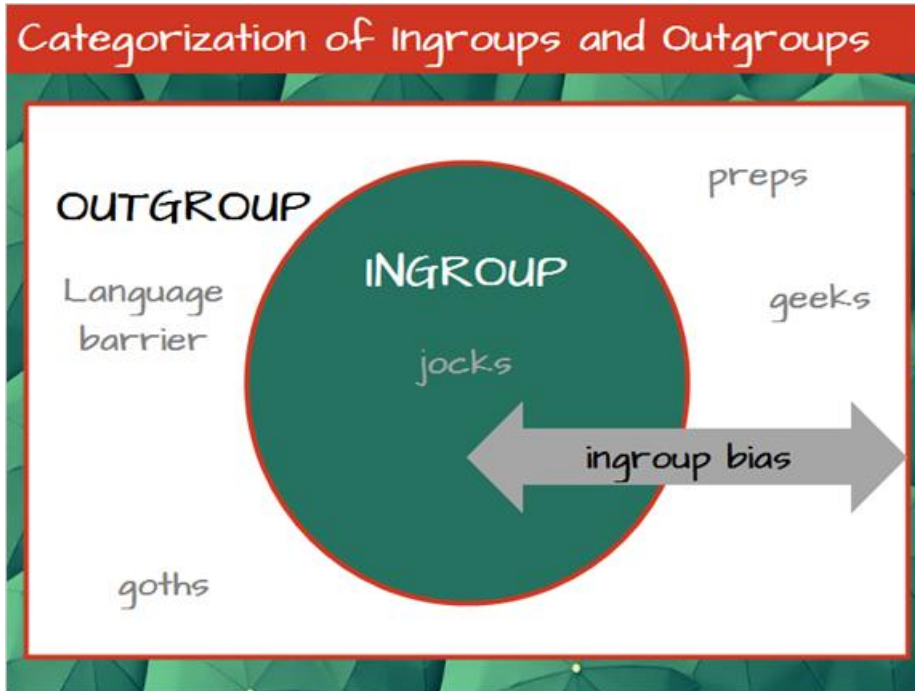


Humans have a tendency to define an **ingroup**, “us,” and an **outgroup**, “them.” Ingroups consist of people who share a common identity, and outgroups consist of people who are viewed as different or apart. Ingroups and outgroups have existed as early as hunters and gatherers who divided into bands and tribes. Although often negative terms, creating an “us” and “them” mentality with the earliest humans, likely helped people survive through cooperation and conformity.

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#### Categorization of Ingroups and Outgroups

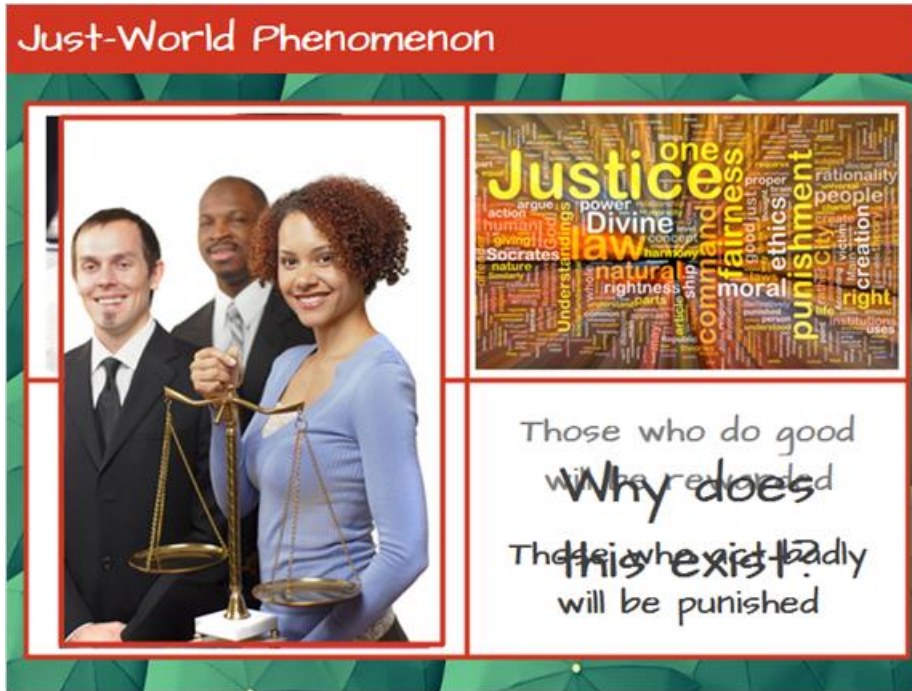


Some ingroup and outgroup categorizations are based on real differences. For example, people who speak a different language may not be able to communicate effectively, and therefore fall into a different group. Other categorizations, however, are trivial and invented. For example, some student groups are labeled jocks, preps, goths, or geeks. Whether someone falls into an ingroup or outgroup is a matter of perspective. Specifically, favoring one's own group, often at the expense of an outgroup, is called **ingroup bias**.

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### Just-World Phenomenon



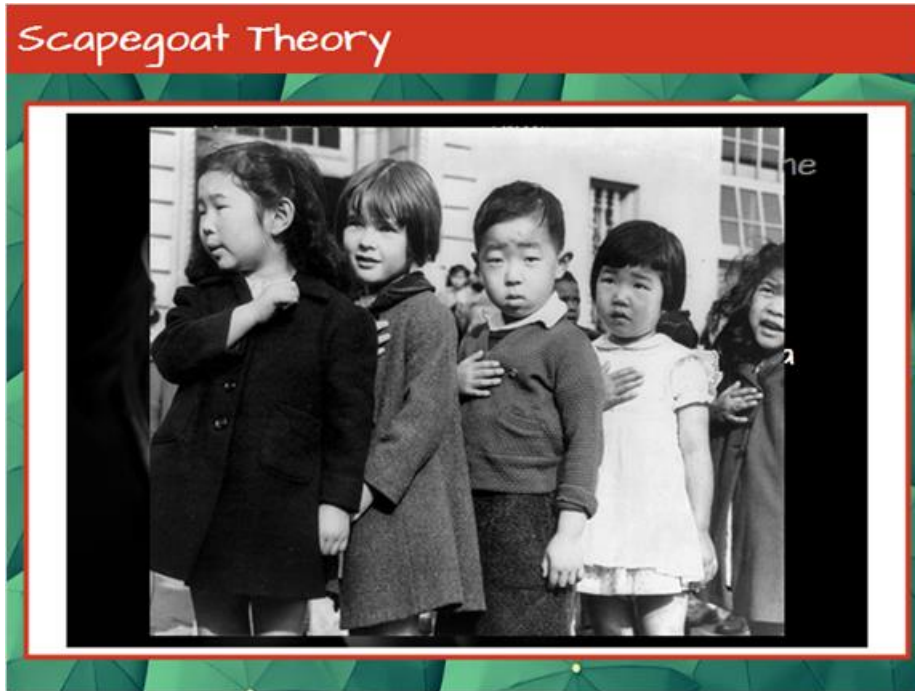
Social inequalities underpin many forms of prejudice throughout the world. Those with more money, power, or prestige often develop prejudiced attitudes to explain their good fortune, called the **just-world phenomenon**. Specifically, this phenomenon is rooted in the idea that those who do good will be rewarded, and those who act badly will be punished. This way of thinking can sometimes lead to skewed perceptions and attitudes. For instance, some may believe a person is homeless because he or she has neglected to do something, and therefore deserves to experience homelessness. While this may be true for some who are homeless, it does not explain the situation for everyone.

The just-world phenomenon may exist because of people's psychological need to view the world as fair. If, for example, people believe bad things only happen to bad people, and most people consider themselves good, having this mindset may prove comforting. Unfortunately, however, having the attitude that people are deserving of their bad situations, makes it difficult for victims to find justice during tragic events.

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#### Scapegoat Theory



Prejudice has an emotional component. When something goes wrong for a person or group, for example, people tend to search for someone to blame, called the **scapegoat theory**. Scapegoating may occur because of people's desire to preserve their reputation, and enhance their self-esteem. This prejudiced way of thinking was evident during World War II when Japanese-American citizens were sent to detention camps after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. This event sparked anti-Japanese sentiments in the United States, which caused many Americans to overgeneralize, and lump loyal Japanese-Americans in with the wartime enemy of Japan.

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#### Emotional Considerations



People who feel secure and have a positive self-regard are less likely to experience the negative emotions that lead to or intensify prejudice. For this reason, taking steps to minimize fear and anger may prove powerful when trying to reduce prejudice and its negative effects.

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#### Cognitive Short-Cuts



You already know that cognitive short-cuts like heuristics and chunking help people make sense of and remember large amounts of complex data. However, when these types of short-cuts are applied to people and social groups, stereotyped thinking often arises.

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#### Other-Race Effect



The **other-race effect** explains that a person is more likely to notice small differences within his or her racial or ethnic ingroup than within an outgroup. Similarly, when confronted with a person who has mixed racial features, people are more likely to notice the features that are different from their own race. These cognitive tendencies should be taken into account when considering witness testimonies during trials, because a witness to a crime may be less reliable in identifying a particular individual due to the other-race effect's impact on precision and memory.



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#### Possible Solutions



Despite social, emotional, and cognitive factors that may lead to prejudice, recognizing and remembering the social inequalities in your society can help reduce victim-blaming tendencies and assumptions of the just-world phenomenon. In addition, taking steps to reduce anger and fear can lower the emotional heat that fuels prejudice and discrimination. By interacting more readily with people from outgroups, you can reduce the kinds of overgeneralized thinking that leaves stereotypes unchallenged.