

# Ingroups and Outgroups

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## Journey Through Chapter 7

### Sightseeing:

On your journey, you will visit ingroups and outgroups and learn about intergroup boundaries that construct differences between cultural groups. Taking a social construction perspective, you will explore how language is used to identify and distinguish between ingroups and outgroups, and explore how group vitality and communication accommodation theory describe important aspects of intergroup communication processes.

### Souvenir:

After your journey, you will take away an understanding of intergroup communication processes and the role of language in group identity.

This chapter introduces some key elements from an **intergroup communication perspective** (see Giles & Watson, 2008), one of many different ways of exploring intercultural relations. This approach studies the effects of talking to someone from another culture based *solely* on that individual's membership in that group, rather than talking to the person based on **individuating information**, that is, unique characteristics, such as personality or temperament. The former would be considered a highly **intergroup interaction**, whereas the latter would be much more **inter-individual** in nature (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Intercultural encounters can be either of these extremes—and, sometimes, with the same person on different occasions. For example, conversing with a newly fostered sister from China as though

she was just one longstanding member of the family on one day yet on the next (perhaps because she seems overly demanding) treating her as a complete outsider.

Actually, it is difficult to locate interactions that are not intergroup, at least to some degree (see Giles, Reid, & Harwood, 2010; Harwood & Giles, 2005). Take, for instance, the following snippet from a conversation between John and Frangelica who are of Irish and Sicilian heritage respectively:

You are so, so special and unique, with the most bubbly personality! The fact that we're from so very different backgrounds does not affect my feelings toward you one bit. It's *you* who I love—this has nothing, nothing to do with where you came from . . .

Although John's sentiments are highly personal, idiosyncratic, and hence very inter-individual in character, all this is expressly contrasted with Frangelica's different ethnic heritage and, therefore, her social identity is also salient in this conversation. Concepts introduced subsequently, such as ingroups and outgroups, intergroup boundaries, and group vitalities, are important to the study of intergroup communication and can assist when analyzing interactions with those from another culture (be it national, organizational, generational, etc.). To inform about these topics, the chapter provides a discussion of ingroups and outgroups and the role language plays in group identification. In order to explain how distinctions between ingroups and outgroups are communicated, intergroup boundaries are explored followed by a section on labeling. Next, group vitality, an important aspect of group identity, is discussed. Finally, the chapter explores communication accommodation theory and its role in intergroup processes.

**REFLECT 7.1:** Are you currently living in a community comprised of mostly members of your own cultural group? What benefits can be gained from living in such a community?

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## INGROUPS AND OUTGROUPS

An **ingroup** is a social category or group with which you identify strongly. An **outgroup**, conversely, is a social category or group with which you do not identify. An important characteristic of the in-outgroup dichotomy is that groups mark their identities communicatively by the distinctive language and speech styles they create and use, the dress codes they adopt, and the festivals and pageants that highlight their unique traditions and rituals, and so forth. In this way, language and communicative features are important devices for creating an *us* and *them* (see Gaudet & Clément, 2008) as indicated in the following examples of in- and outgroup labels:

- Christian versus Heathen
- Muslim versus Infidel

- Zhong Guo Ren versus Wai Guo Ren (Chinese versus non-Chinese)
- Nihonjin versus Gaijin (Japanese versus “out people”)
- Jew versus Goyim

A broader example is from a videotape allegedly from former Al-Qaeda militant leader Osama bin Laden that proclaimed: “The world has been divided into two camps. One under the banner of the cross and another under the banner of Islam.”

People have many cultural identities that they can call upon. These might include being a student, a surfer, a sporty guy, and so on. Clearly, people can have multiple identities. A person can simultaneously be a Korean who values their ethnic heritage, but is also proud to have become an American citizen. Both components of this dual identity are salient, and each one is triggered on different occasions as being more central to who that person is at that moment. Korean Americans who visit Korea are often surprised—even

**Photo 7.1** Do you see difference or similarity? Preference for people who think, look, and act like you is common. This perceived similarity both enhances friendships and limits opportunities to make friends. In this photo, group membership is not produced by visual race or ethnicity. Instead group membership is produced by the shared activities these children engage in and enjoy together.



when visiting to retrieve some of their lost cultural heritage—to discover that locals see and hear them only as American. Hence, what constitutes the major components of a social identity can vary radically between different outgroups; sometimes the language spoken is key to being an authentic member of a group, but for others it could be birth-right. Knowing what are the essential ingredients of an outgroup's identity can be important diagnostic information, as by this means you know best how to accommodate to them. So when in the West Bank or the Gaza Strip, it has been argued that feeling subjugated and having continually endured conflict are emotional dimensions of a Palestinian identity (see Ellis, 2006).

**REFLECT 7.2:** List the groups of which you are a member, and rank order them in terms of (1) their positive value to you, and (2) the salience these social identities may assume in day-to-day conversations.

**Social identity theory** proposes that when an ingroup identity is made or becomes salient, people often wish to emphasize characteristics of their group that they hold dear (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Communicative symbols are often evoked in this regard and, depending on the intercultural setting involved, can include emphasizing organizational jargon, feminist sentiments, adolescent colloquial phrases, or ethnic accents (Giles & Johnson, 2009). The theory suggests that by expressing its distinctive characteristics, people can thereby assume unqualified pride in their membership in this group. Moreover, the theory suggests that by such expressed public identification with the group, this translates into a greater sense of personal worth. An example would be a Jamaican switching into the local creole when talking to an American tourist on the island, despite the Jamaican's ability to speak standard English. In this way, ingroup members can play off of outgroup members to further bolster their valued ingroup identity as well as their own self-esteem.

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## LANGUAGE AND INGROUP IDENTIFICATION

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Language can be a critical determinant of whether someone views another as an authentic ingroup member or an outgroup imposter. Indeed, even one sound can cause detection as with the notion of **linguistic shibboleths**, which are words or terms that when communicated can identify someone as being a member of a distinctive group. In the Bible (Judges 15, 5–6), an account is provided of the Gileadites who captured large numbers of Ephraimites. If a person answered negatively to the question, “Are you an Ephraimite?” they would then be required to pronounce *Shibboleth*. If the captured said, *Sibboleth* because they could not articulate the appropriate *sh* sound, then their outgroup status was revealed and they were duly killed (along with, purportedly, 42,000 other Ephraimites).

< Kiedy ranne wstaja zorze  
 Kiedy ranne wstaja zorze,  
 Tobie ziemia, Tobie morze,  
 Tobie spiewa zywiol wszelki:  
 badz pochwalon Boze wielki!  
 Tobie spiewa zywiol wszelki:  
 badz pochwalon Boze wielki!  
 A czlowiek, który bez miary  
 obsypany Twymi dary,  
 cos go stworzyl i ocalil,  
 a czemuzy Cie nie chwalil?  
 Cos go stworzyl i ocalil,  
 a czemuzy Cie nie chwalil?

Ledwie oczy przetrzec zdolam,  
 wnet do mego Pana wolam,  
 do mego Boga na niebie,  
 i szukam Go kolo siebie.  
 Do mego Boga na niebie,  
 i szukam Go kolo siebie.  
 Wielu snem smierci upadli,  
 co sie wczoraj spac pokladli,  
 my sie jeszcze obudzili,  
 byśmy Cie, Boze chwalili.  
 My sie jeszcze obudzili,  
 byśmy Cie, Boze chwalili.  
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Do you understand what this says? Language, whether in interpersonal communication, in a business context, or in the media, is one way in which people communicate their ingroup status. If you understand that this is a Polish lullaby titled "When the Morning Dawns Break," then you are an ingroup member with others who share this language.

In general, there is a positive correlation between your identification with a particular ingroup and your expressed use of that group's distinctive communication style. However, in some settings, these ingroup patterns can be predicted more by the groups in which a person does not wish to be identified than ones in which they do. For example, Catalan speakers' decision to use the language Catalan with a Castillian speaker in Barcelona rather than Castillian Spanish is predicted more by the Catalonians' rejection of a Spanish identity than it is by the strength of their Catalanian identity (Giles & Viladot, 1994). In like fashion, if writing to a Catalan colleague in Barcelona, it might be prudent not to address the envelope being mailed to Spain. Likewise, many Britons will not appreciate or respond well to receiving mail addressed to them in Europe as they do not view themselves as part of that continent; rather they would prefer the address to be Britain or UK.

The use of an ingroup language or speech style can be a critical feature of what it means to be a member of many groups. Moreover, the importance of language as a component of a person's social identity can change over the lifespan. For instance, not bringing up your child to speak Cantonese if, say, you have emigrated from Hong Kong to Vancouver may not be that relevant to a Chinese-Canadian teenager whose core identity at that time is an adolescent peer identity anyway. However, later in life, it is fairly common for Chinese emigrés not to

**Take a Side Trip:**

If you would like to read more about related issues, visit Appendix D: Transnational Dominican Culture Through Phenomenological Analysis.

feel entirely and fully Chinese, to feel resentful of their parents for not passing on this linguistic gift to them, and to begin avidly taking Chinese language classes.

Knowing the statuses of different languages in a cul-

ture being visited can be informative because many nations have more than one official language, as is the case with Switzerland which has four. In addition, knowing that there are different forms of the same language as in Arabic and German can be informative for making appropriate language choices. The “lower” form of the language is typically for use in informal contexts in the home and the neighborhood, whereas as the “higher” form is used in formal institutional contexts, such as in church services and in professional situations (e.g., addressing an instructor with two doctorate degrees as Herr Professor Dr. Dr.).

**INTERGROUP BOUNDARIES**

Because of their role in intergroup communication, it is important to recognize **intergroup boundaries**. These are symbolically equivalent to geographical borders, yet are reflected in more psychological and communicative dimensions. For example, you communicate intergroup boundaries when you contend that you have different ways of looking at the world, spiritual rituals and moral standards, and so forth. Intergroup boundaries can be found in food and drink, and even in the use of utensils. Brits are often regarded as impolite by some Americans for their use of eating utensils, by retaining the knife in their hand rather than setting it down. Americans are regarded by some Brits as “shovelers” for their ubiquitous use of the fork while eating because it is impolite to turn a fork over when eating with one in Britain. To get the right eating practices involves cultural knowledge (see Cleveland, Laroche, Pons, & Kastoun, 2009). Asking for chopsticks in Thailand can be seen as curiously ignorant when most ethnic Thais actually do not use these, but a fork! Given the vehement reactions using outside practices can evoke, a “bilingual eater” would accommodate local practices.

Language and physiognomy can be vivid intergroup boundaries felt as impervious to the extent that they limit the ability of a person to become a genuine member of the group in the eyes and ears of its members. Although **permeability of intergroup boundaries** such as being bicultural and a nativelike speaker of another group’s language is possible (Kim, 2001), some groups contend that their characteristics are so unique as to be quite inaccessible (and impermeable) to outgroups. For instance, people in Japan, at least in the recent past, have felt Westerners cannot readily learn their language and, thereby, their cultural identity is rigorously held to be impermeable. In this vein, Americans who are fluent Japanese speakers sometimes find that Japanese locals will not respond or accommodate back to them in Japanese but, rather (and if they are bilingual), will continue in English for however long the

American persists in speaking Japanese. In other words, an outsider's seemingly over-accommodative and invasive use of Japanese is difficult to tolerate when locals intransigently adhere to cultural boundaries.

## LABELING

Labels can be used to delineate boundaries. For example, knowing that many Hong Kongers will generically label all German, Swede, or Irish persons *Westerners* is valuable information to have in terms of how you may be viewed there. In parallel, Britons may label an American as a *Canadian*, or an American may ascribe Australianess to a New Zealander, and be surprised by the disgust their miscategorization evoked! Appreciating social sensitivities such as these is important when receiving and giving cultural labels and understanding the affect that these can evoke. When asked, in a study, to consider how Belgian and Dutch students felt one week after the 9/11 attacks in the United States, those who were told the experiment was about Arab and Western reactions expressed more fear about future terrorist attacks than those who were informed that the investigators were examining American and European reactions (Dumont, Yzerbyt, Wigboldus, & Gordij, 2003) because of the labels with which they associated themselves.

After 9/11, many Sikhs from India (who are renowned for their turbans and beards) are often falsely attributed as Muslims. As a consequence and because of anti-Muslim racism, they have been subject to vicious ethnic slurs and some even have had their property fire-bombed. The act of being falsely foisted with an outgroup label is known as **categorization threat** for the recipient. The term *threat* is intended to reflect the potential dire consequences of the label. Another example of this is when someone's citizenship status is called into question. It has been estimated that one-third of Asian-Americans who were born in the United States are frequently asked: "Where do you *really* come from?" (Cheryan & Monin, 2005). This is called **identity denial** because those asking the question deny those being questioned their own identity as American. The defensive reaction to this type of identity denial is often characterized by communicating allegiance to American values (e.g., feeling moved when the national anthem is played) and espousing American practices (e.g., playing basketball and baseball).

Knowing how outgroups use ethnic slurs or **ethnophaulisms** and what their social meanings might be is critical information on how a society views groups and their relative positions within the **intergroup status hierarchy**. This term denotes the fact that most groups in contact have more or less status (and power), and that there is often a multicultural consensus about the rank ordering of social groups in a particular society. Hence, there can be a relationship between a group's position in the intergroup status hierarchy and the more frequently offensive slurs aimed at this group. These ethnophaulisms are multidimensional in terms of their complexities and valence. In terms of the latter, ethnic slurs vary along a dimension of negativity. *Taffy* is a somewhat innocuous term for a Welsh-American (and simply refers to the River Taff that flows through the capital city of Wales). Other slurs are, of course, way more pernicious—and certainly so evident that they do not need to be highlighted here. Studies by Mullen and his associates (e.g., Mullen & Smyth, 2004) have shown that the less complex

and more negative the slur assigned to an ethnic group, the members of that group are less likely to marry into the mainstream dominant group, more likely to hold low-paid occupations, appear less attractively in children's literature, and are even more likely to commit suicide. In other words, the simpler and worse an outgroup is viewed, the more negative consequences there are for those having that group membership. Researchers have also shown that the origins of labels people adopt for their ingroup, called **ethnonyms**, can be symbolically important (Mullen, Calogero, & Leader, 2007). Indeed, it has been shown that the more complex or the more diverse an ingroup reflects ethnonyms, the less intergroup hostility they experience.

**REFLECT 7.3:** Think about the ethnic groups in your city or province. What labels, if any, do you hear or see associated with these groups?

Direct slurs can sometimes be viewed as less harmful than more subtle, indirect expressions of disdain. In one study, Leets and Giles (1997) had people read a vignette that depicted a Euro-American publicly proclaiming at a bus stop about not wishing to board a bus driven by an Asian-American when it arrived. In one condition, a repeated sequence of ethnophaulisms (too offensive to specify here) were expressed that were in contrast to the other condition where the sentiment was expressed in a more indirect way, namely: "I don't feel comfortable taking your bus. I'll wait for the next one and see if I feel safer with that one." Anglo-American readers of the vignette reported that the direct slurs were far more harmful to the target than the indirect; however, the Asian-American readers (avowedly accustomed to frequent ethnic slurs) reported that it was the *indirect* message that was the most harmful. Arguably, indirect confrontations are quite difficult to manage communicatively, leading to uncertainty about how to respond effectively and, therefore, are associated with heightened anxiety.

Linguistic subtleties can be viewed in another way by listening to the language people use to describe or report on the actions of ingroups and outgroups—and this pertains to the so-called **linguistic intergroup bias** (see Sutton & Douglas, 2008). This effect manifests when people describe differently those that do honorable acts depending on their group memberships. If your ingroup is behaving in a socially positive manner, then the act is described in terms of global traits. For example, giving to a charity is talked about solely in terms of the *generosity* of the donor. However, if an outgroup member committed this very same act, they may be described only in *specific* behavioral terms—as giving so much money to a particular charity. This allows perceptions of ingroup members overall to be favorable, although for outgroup members it doesn't generalize beyond the single act. When doing despicable acts, people talk about ingroup and outgroup actions in the correspondingly converse ways. This, then, allows outgroup members overall to be viewed negatively for engaging in even a single negative act, although the same act for an ingroup member is less likely to affect the overall impression someone has of them. In these ways, intergroup actions are linguistically sustained as stereotypically positive for the ingroup and reaffirmed as far less so for the outgroup.




**LIVING  
CULTURE**
**Crip Mate***David Linton**Marymount Manhattan College*

"Was she always . . . ?" "When did she . . . ?" "Did you know her before . . . ?" People want to know if I fell in love with and married my wife before or after she had the accident that severed her spinal cord and required her to use a wheelchair.

People who use wheelchairs come to expect rude inquiries, "What happened to you?" Different response strategies emerge. Feigned innocence: "What do you mean?" Belligerence: "It's none of your damn business." Heroic dramatization: "I was dropped behind enemy lines and my chute didn't open." Ju-Jitsu: "I'm fine, thanks. What happened to you?"

After more than 25 years of thinking about how to answer those intrusive questions, I'm still not sure how to respond. If I answer that we were married before she became disabled, then the pity look would appear. "Oh, you poor man," you could almost hear them thinking, "what a burden to have thrust upon you." Next they'd want to know how long I had been married before "it" happened, whether I had been able to have a family, how I had borne up under the extra responsibilities that must come to a person wed to one with a disability.

When people learn that Simi became disabled years before we met, a different set of fantasies plays out to figure out why an AB (one of the disability community's slang for able bodied folks like me) would enter a relationship with someone with a disability. The first is that we have some sort of martyr complex, a need to sacrifice ourselves for the good of another. At times this makes us seem noble, generous, self-sacrificing. The other theory is that we are secret fetishists, that we get kinky pleasure out of physical intimacy with bodies that have undergone scarring trauma. Of course, there are those who understand that love is not necessarily bound by conventions. Falling in love with someone is a full body and soul experience.

I won't deny that in addition to her beauty and sexy ways I was intrigued by Simi's disability and the way it shaped how she experienced the world. At the age of 23 Simi was injured in an automobile accident. Both her husband and her best friend were killed so her scars were both internal and external. By the time we met in graduate school, she'd been through rehab, had her own apartment, her own life, and had created a new advocacy organization called the Coalition for Sexuality and Disability. She had already cut out a place for herself in the world of disability culture. I was fascinated by the whole package.

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## LIVING CULTURE

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After a few conversations during class breaks I asked her to have dinner with me. We set a time and she mentioned, "I'll be wearing a red carnation so you'll be able to find me." It wasn't until that night when she *wasn't* wearing a carnation that I realized that she was toying with my feigned indifference to her disability. There was something about her wry humor that let me know I was dealing with someone who would shake up my assumptions and open me to new ways of looking at the world. The wheelchair does not diminish the fact that she was and is a beautiful, interesting woman. And the life she has led and the insights she has gained and shared with me because of the wheelchair make her all the more intriguing. Simply put, she inhabits an exotic world.

As a disability activist, writer, and filmmaker, Simi is deeply involved in that world and, as her mate, I am allowed entry. Members of the disability community are comfortable calling each other *crips* as a term of bonding and affection but of course I am not entitled to the term. But they do have a word for people like me, a label that bestows on us status and distinction: *crip mate*.

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### Consider:

1. The essay begins with a set of questions. Does the author ever provide the reader with answers to these? If so, what do you think the answers are?
2. What ingroups and outgroups are identified in this essay?
3. What are the characteristics of the ingroups and outgroups in this essay?
4. What do you think about labels that are considered proprietary to certain groups like crips?

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## GROUP VITALITY

The concept of **group vitality** has received a lot of attention in the multicultural literature. It refers to how much a group has social advantages in terms of pride in its history, sheer numbers of its members, and the visibility of its culture and communicative codes in the important layers of society. It is made up of three separate, but interrelated, dimensions of status, demographics, and institutional support that are each discussed in the next few sections. One of the means of deciding whether your ingroup has a positive identity or not is to compare the group's characteristics along these vitality dimensions with that of the outgroup. For

instance, how does your group fare in terms of its language's use in the media, educational curricula, and in local commerce vis-à-vis that of the outgroup? The vitality of an ingroup, as well as an outgroup, can, arguably, be measured objectively. You can count the number of demonstrators seen to protest the new illegal immigrant policies adopted in Arizona to inform you about the group vitality of immigrants. However, data collection is not immune from biases. How do you decide how many people are actually participating in a march, and for how long? This is an unenviable analytical task.

Just as important as *objective* vitality are its perceptual dimensions, namely **subjective group vitality** (Giles, Bourhis, & Taylor, 2009), that is, how people view their own and others group vitalities. It has been argued that we are aware of the vitalities of all the social groups to which we belong by mere (yet continual) perusals of media depictions and reports of relevant intergroup scenes. Further, **ethnolinguistic identity theory** contends that the higher your ingroup vitality, the more members are willing to invest in their ingroup emotionally,

**Photo 7.2** What value does celebration have to you? Celebrations and rituals such as those that occur for holidays, weddings, funerals, and parades have value for culture. For example, celebrations provide the opportunity for members of a community to show their cultural solidarity and pride. This may be especially important for groups with a low group vitality.



psychologically, and with respect to collective action to foster their own group's interests (Giles & Johnson, 2009). Put another way, there appears little merit in, or gain from, possessing a vitality that has a consensually low subjective vitality in terms of its status, demographic health, and institutional support. Ingroups and their cultures, including their languages and literatures, will survive and flourish (e.g., Catalan, Navajo, Irish Gaelic, and Luxembourgish), continue to be creative and innovative, and expand and be socially influential, if they have high perceived ingroup vitality. In general, high vitality groups are usually dominant groups, those in the upper echelons of any intergroup status hierarchy, whereas low vitality groups are marginalized groups, those relegated toward the bottom end of this continuum.

It is important to note that for dominant groups to maintain their social privileges and advantages, they might need to control public information that perpetuates low subjective vitality among subordinate groups. Members of low vitality groups, for their part, may be disposed to assimilate into other more prestigious collectivities to gain enhanced personal worth and dignity. Consequently, their communication codes might fade away into oblivion in a manner referred to as **language suicide**.

**REFLECT 7.4:** How are ethnic minorities in your hometown represented in radio and on television? If you think there are differences between how groups are represented, why do you think this might be?

## Status

One important subdimension of group vitality has been labeled **status**. This refers to the influence and power a group has economically, historically, socially, and linguistically. For example, regarding the latter, Greek may not have high status as an international language; yet, in

Melbourne (purportedly the second largest “Greek city”), it has accrued considerable local currency. Groups with high vitality will usually have a history of which they are proud and this can be reflected in school texts, TV serials, monuments, painted street wall

### Take a Side Trip:



If you would like to read more about related issues, visit Appendix C: Dagaaba Culture of Ghana Explored Through Rhetorical Analysis.

murals, and so forth. However, sometimes flawed historical events, such as military defeats, can be mobilizing even hundreds of years later (e.g., the Battle of Bannockburn for the Scots) as the ingroup ponders its cultural survival in the face of colonializing influences and aggression. Communicating history is a potent intergroup force. This can be illustrated not only in Japan's prior refusals to apologize for their militaristic actions in World War II, but in its reinforcing historical biases in these regards in educational texts for Japanese school children (Edwards, 2005).

Other subdimensions of this status vitality factor include economic and linguistic statuses whereby certain groups seem to excel in business and commerce, and their language and dialect is still an important mode of communication. In the latter regard, note the impressive

resurrection and revitalizing of ethnic languages in the wake of both the dissolution of the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. Interestingly, as globalization takes hold of market economies, languages—as precious resources of ingroup vitality—can take on unprecedented social capital with a group’s desires for cultural distinctiveness and authenticity. For example, many ethnic minorities and smaller cultures have feared being homogenized by the establishment of the European Union. This concern can then lead to cultural and linguistic revitalization (as with the increased use of, and support for, the Breton, Basque, and Frisian languages) in ways that could never have been predicted decades earlier.

## Demographics

**Demographics** (that is, the population and location features of groups) are, too, a key dimension of group vitality. Hence, attempted massacres, genocide, and ethnic cleansing perpetrated against certain groups can be seen as concrete means of delimiting the violated group’s perceived strength. Interestingly, such acts of atrocity are still committed all around the world (e.g., Nigeria and Indonesia) and in the cultural heartlands of outgroups, such as Christians slaying Muslims in their mosques and defiling their sacred places and the latter, in turn, desecrating churches, altars, and crosses. Demographic vitality can be manifest in a range of different means. For example, ingroup sanctions against those engaged in ethnic mixed marriages can be interpreted as one way of maintaining ingroup vitality, particularly when it is the female of a subordinate group that marries into a dominant group family. In this case, it is often the language and culture of the woman that is lost and not passed onto future generations because of her ingroup’s low group vitality.

When immigrants enter and settle in a country or region of which they are not native, the spread of their languages within it (e.g., Spanish into the western states of the United States and East European languages and Turkish into Western Europe) may be considered, by some longstanding residents, as a diminution of their own host group’s language. Mainstream backlashes often result as a way of ameliorating the threat. Oftentimes immigrating groups and refugees (such as the Hmong in the United States) are strategically dispersed across a nation’s territory by the host government agencies so as not to have them concentrated in demographically strong enclaves. Acting in this way can diminish the dispersed group’s cultural solidarity and, thereby, stymie their potential to possess economic and political muscle.

Emigration is the movement, voluntary or forced, of one group to another geographical and culture space. Emigration, especially of a group’s educated youth, can decrease ingroup vitality. Much attention has been given to so-called White flight in certain areas of the United States where Euro-Americans parents withdraw their children from schools where African American and Hispanic children are seen as becoming more dominant, and therefore vitality threatening. San Francisco has recently seen the emergence of “Black flight” whereby African Americans have moved out of the city to other areas. As a result, Asian-Americans have moved into these neighborhoods, causing resentment, conflict, and crime among some of those remaining.

## Institutional Support

**Institutional support** is the last important dimension of a group’s vitality and refers to the extent to which a group and its culture are reflected in the main structures of society, such as in the media, politics, the law, and so forth. The use of the ingroup language in ethnic

newspapers, newsletters, magazines and Internet sites, as well as the ability to see it in the national and international news on the TV, are potent forms of high vitality. Indeed, in one study, institutional support was perceived as the most important of the three vitality factors (Giles, Rosenthal, & Young, 1985). Knowledge of, as well as talk about (see Harwood, Giles, & Bourhis, 1994), a group's presence in the educational curriculum, its continued use in religious settings, and even the growth of its own unique places of worship can make profound statements about its cultural capital. In Britain for instance, it has been estimated that there are no less than 1,600 mosques there for worship. Moreover, attention given to the building of mosques and their minarets (symbolically represented as guided missiles in the Swiss media) brought about a wave of indignation amongst non-Muslims in Switzerland. Likewise, the construction of Israeli settlements in Arab communities, be it considered legitimate from the Jewish side or not, is a threat to Palestinian vitality as well as the permeability of the group's cultural boundaries.

The **linguistic landscape** is a powerful means of establishing and legitimizing a sense of ingroup pride and vitality. The visual and sensory energies of neighborhoods like Little Italies and Chinatowns in the United States, as discussed in Chapter 1, are replete with ethnically distinctive odors, and with signage widely proclaiming that the ethnic tongue (at least in terms of road and shop signs) is very much alive and well. Moreover, the groups' festivals, music and song, sculptures and fine art, as well as many other cultural artifacts in the home are markers of ingroup solidarity and valued distinctiveness.

Certainly, relative group vitalities are not a static phenomenon, and a person's appraisal of them should not be considered etched in stone. Groups continually vie for an increasing share of overall vitality as this, in part, contributes to their survival in the local intergroup, as well as sometimes the global, scene. In other words, just because a traveler formulated a vitality profile for a cultural destination a few years earlier does not mean that the profile would be the same now. Because of all sorts of intergroup and international forces, vitality profiles are not static—they are quite malleable.

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## COMMUNICATION ACCOMMODATION THEORY

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**Communication accommodation theory** is a framework that explores the reasons for, and consequences arising from, speakers converging toward and diverging away from each other (see Gallois, 2008; Giles & Ogay, 2006). Typically, recipients generally receive convergent moves favorably. This accommodation conveys respect and effort that, in turn, renders appreciative responses, such as liking and altruism. For recipients, the effects of intergroup accommodation can also generalize to broader and more positive feelings about the entire culture and group to which the converger belongs. Naturally, the consequences of this are interactional satisfaction that can yield a range of other social payoffs, such as a general pleasure at being in the culture and with its people, a desire to revisit at a later time, the fostering of business deals in the future, and so forth.

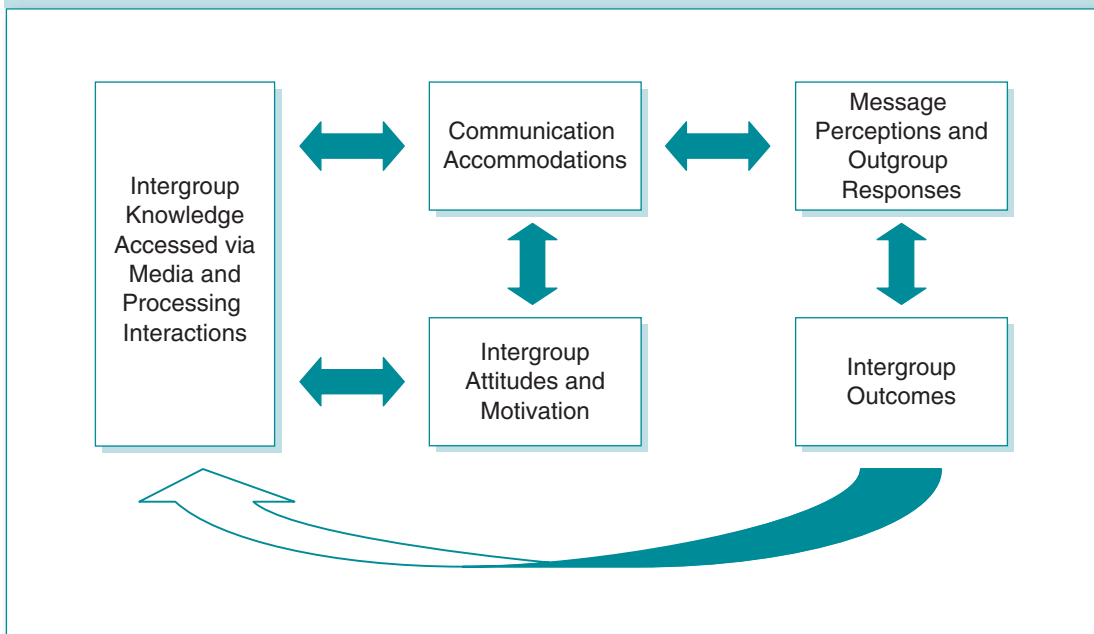
It must be borne in mind that any cultural group is often made up of quite heterogeneous subgroups and members who will hold widely differing values, beliefs, and various ways of expressing their identities. In other words, meeting up with people from another culture does not mean you will engage a monolith. Even when you accommodate, you will want to be sensitive to the inevitable variability of people even within a single cultural group (see Gallois & Callan, 1997).

## Convergence

Accommodating to an outgroup language—even in terms of simple hellos, expressing thanks, and ordering, say, drinks can demonstrate convergence in which you are trying to join with outgroup members. **Accommodative moves** like these are behavioral attempts to accommodate that may be welcomed and can engender genuine cooperative responses in many cultures. That said, such affiliative approaches would have to be viewed as accommodative as sometimes people hear what they wish to. Work on the **retroactive speech halo effect** (Ball et al., 1982) is relevant here, and is built upon the notion that fast speech rates and standard accents are construed as positive attributes of speakers across many cultures. Hence the effect is manifest in that if a person believes a speaker is of high status, they would be heard to *sound* more standard accented and faster in speech rate than if no status information was available about them or, especially, if they were known to be of low status. In this way and as shown in Figure 7.1, accommodative moves, such as a Japanese-fluent American speaking Japanese to a Japanese person, are susceptible to biases and may not always be received in the way they were intended.

**Figure 7.1** Intergroup Model of Accommodative Processes.

Does this model explain your intercultural encounters? The complexity of intercultural communication is often hard to grasp. This model provides an explanation of how these interactions might work.



*Source:* Adapted based on communication accommodation theory (Gallois, 2008; Giles & O'gay, 2006).

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Interestingly, this caution is contrary to the accommodative advice suggested earlier and, hence, important to appreciate and anticipate; otherwise, it can lead to resentment and a dissatisfactory intergroup climate. In light of this caution, locals could construct a Japanese-fluent American switching back into English as the appropriate accommodative move. Hence, accommodations are not simply the province of sociolinguistic acts alone but also other variables involved.

The keen observer of an intergroup scene should find it informative to determine which and how many ethnic minority groups are located in a targeted cultural milieu and to explore their interrelationships within the culture; Italy, for instance, has at least 13 ethnolinguistic communities. Knowing, for instance, that America is a male-dominant culture that often treats women as a special class to be protected would allow every chivalrous act, like a man holding the door open for a woman, to make more sense. In tandem, observing norms within cultural behavior such as the kinds of jobs women are seen to be in, the roles they play in shopping, taking care of children, older people, and pets, their style of dress, and whether, as is the case in Kuwait, they have to buy hamburgers in a different location than men can be diagnostic of their social position.

## Divergence

In intergroup interaction, social stereotypes about ingroups and outgroups can be triggered that could alter the ways messages are exchanged between intergroup members in such a way as to create divergence or a distance between ingroups and outgroups. Knowledge of stereotypes of various groups (and their subtypes), the kinds of emotions they stir up, and their attributed origins can also be as important information about the groups as the kinds of ethnophobias that exist about them. This can be especially important in terms of the outgroup or host culture's images of particular groups of foreigners and the reasons triggered to account for them. Particularly, knowing how you might be perceived by others, and why, can be enormously helpful in adapting to a culture and its members (see Reid & Anderson, 2010). This is a difficult situation to deal with and especially so, for example, when stereotypes of U.S. Americans (such as their being aggressive, arrogant, superior, imperialist, loud, and so forth) are written large on the linguistic landscape—as in graffiti on walls in large letters saying “Yanks Go Home!” What is even more frightening is the **infracommunication effect** whereby people have a tendency to attribute and express human qualities to members of their ingroup, but less human and more animalistic properties to outgroups, such as *knuckleheads* or *gooks* (see Vaes & Paladino, 2010).

Although research on group vitality has been devoted mostly to interethnic group settings, it is important to underscore that other forms of cultural groupings—including the generations, organized street gangs, hearing impaired (and deaf culture), police, and so forth—all lend themselves to cogent analysis in these terms. Given power disparities and vitality disparities, intergroup accommodation is, more often than not, unidirectional to the extent that subordinate groups communicatively align themselves more with dominant groups than vice versa. This might be a problem for society because it hampers its ability to evolve or be empowered to embrace the cultural capital of another community that has its own enriching resources.



All this could lead to **accommodative dilemmas**, which occur when people have to communicatively manage others' miscategorizations of, or overt or covert abuse toward, their group in their conversations. For example, a U.S. American student studying abroad is questioned by the patriarch of her host family about whether she fits the stereotypes he holds of U.S. Americans. The student faces an accommodative dilemma because she has to manage how she responds to his questions in order to be accommodative while navigating his mischaracterization of U.S. American culture. Such situations are particularly challenging if people wish to amend an outgroup's feelings about, and images of, their ingroup. One intercultural sphere, namely intergenerational communication, has expanded some modest effort in this direction by looking at the ways older people can deflect or manage situations (e.g., by being assertive or humorous) in which they have been patronized because of their age (Ryan, Kennaley, Pratt, & Shumovich, 2000).

The thrust of this chapter is that it is important, in all these respects, to understand how other groups (as well as meaningful subgroups within them) might perceive you and your cultural group, that is, how people label, stereotype, describe, and react to you. Group members need to inquire into the social origins of perceptions of their group, however illegitimate and disturbing these cognitions and emotions feel. In this sense, people need to appreciate that if another group member diverges away from them in speech style or nonverbally, and also denigrates them overtly or covertly, that they should not necessarily take this personally but, rather, take it as a more generic reaction to group membership in a perceived social category. In this way, personal respect and esteem can typically only be improved to the extent that the outgroup culture revises the image of the ingroup as a whole more positively, or views each person in the ingroup as unique individuals to be valued positively due to salient individuating information. Moreover, it is important to underscore *perceived* in the foregoing advisedly as sometimes people are categorized into cultural groupings erroneously by others based on inferences about the perceived character of their communicative styles; for example, being attributed by a U.S. American as English when you are Irish.

## Intergroup Model of Accommodative Processes

The model depicted in Figure 7.1 is a summarized way of schematizing the argument developed in this chapter. Starting with the top left box, a person needs to garner knowledge about the outgroup(s) being visited, and relate this to ingroup ways of interacting. Such knowledge can be gained by direct face-to-face interactions, vicarious observations of, and even imagined contact with outgroup members (see Turner, 2010). **Intergroup contact** can come by way of conversations with, and observations of, the host culture through its media, literature, and knowledge of its history (Harwood, 2010). Interestingly, few intercultural communication programs are devised to provide potential vacationers (and business people) with recorded histories of the groups involved, let alone from both cultures' perspectives (Cargile & Giles, 1996).

Enriched by this intergroup knowledge, more positive attitudes toward the outgroup and increased motivations to be communicatively involved with them can be engendered (as well as perhaps new insights evoked about a person's ingroup, too). These intergroup

attitudes and motivations (middle lower box in Figure 7.1) then allow a person to be better placed to make appropriate communicative accommodations to the outgroup and manage accommodative dilemmas, be it in terms of key words, phrases, or accepted dress styles for particular contexts, and so forth. In the ideal world, the outgroup will recognize these accommodations, and should reciprocal accommodations follow (see top right box), then positive intergroup outcomes (e.g., intercultural communication satisfaction) will ensue (see right lower box). The arrows in Figure 7.1 are bilateral to indicate feedback cycles as in the case of intercultural satisfaction promoting future, and perhaps more extensive, accommodations as well as satisfaction encouraging the pursuit of further intergroup knowledge.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

A skeptic reading this chapter might conclude that intercultural encounters are a minefield that should be avoided at all costs! The intent, of course, has not been to spawn such fears, but rather, that you remain mindful of, and become more sophisticated about, complex intergroup dynamics as tourists, businesspeople and the like. This can help to navigate misattributions, miscommunication, and even conflicts and increase the benefits gained from intercultural interaction. Some cultures encountered greet people with open arms if their images of that group have been historically and politically positive, as well as economically and militarily supportive. Possibly and intuitively, it is these very cultures that people choose to embrace as they plan trips abroad in order to minimize the demands of the intergroup work referred to previously and enhance the intercultural satisfaction they so wish to enjoy. Even then, people need to be open and welcoming to those who inevitably and frequently enter (and, in some people's minds, invade) their own cultural space as refugees, visitors, and migrants. Hopefully, the model scheme in Figure 7.1 will be a useful heuristic for managing the plethora of intergroup and intercultural episodes that readers will inevitably encounter over their life spans.

### CONTINUE YOUR JOURNEY ONLINE



**Visit:** [www.babyboomers.com/](http://www.babyboomers.com/)

The National Association of Baby Boomers website. Learn about how this generation views its cultural identity. Explore issues that are important for this generation. How does this group construct itself through the website as distinct from other groups?

#### Note

We wish to extend sincere appreciation to the editor of this volume for her encouragement throughout the process and her wonderfully cogent and extensive comments on earlier drafts.

## “ SAY WHAT?

Say What? provides excerpts from overheard real-life conversations in which people have communicated stereotypes. As you read these conversations, reflect on the following questions.

- Have you been in conversations like this before?
- Is there any one of these conversations that stick out to you more than the others? Why or why not?
- What do you think of this conversation?
- How did the stereotype help or hinder the conversation?
- Was there another way the stereotyper could have communicated to convey the same point?
- How do you feel when you hear this conversation or the specific stereotype?
- Do any concepts, issues, or theories discussed in the chapter help explain why?

- **Say What?** Jen walked right past the two of us mumbling something about how she can not stand how the house is always looking sloppy. She noticed a pot with rice stuck to it soaking in water and said, “See like this gook pot soaking in the sink; I am sick of this.” Melissa and I just looked at each other and then laughed out loud and so did Jen. I informed Jen that it was me who was responsible for the pot of rice soaking in the sink and not our Chinese roommate.
- **Say What?** Shelly and I were discussing one of the girls that had come out to rush sorority, “Marie,” who had been extremely shy, kind of hard to talk to, and lived in the honors dorm. She was very nice and seemed to be a little nervous. Shelly then implied that maybe we would not want her in sorority because she is probably a boring person and probably isn’t too much fun to be around. I was kind of surprised that she was so blunt about it. Then after a couple of seconds I disagreed with her. I told her that not all shy, smart people were necessarily boring.
- **Say What?** This past Saturday my friend and I were at the bank standing in line. She just needed change. The line was really outrageous and she didn’t want to wait. So she said, “I guess I have to wait in this line. I would ask someone in line for change but they don’t look like they have any money.” I said to her, “Wow isn’t that a stereotype.” The people in the line were all Mexican except us. I thought it was really ironic that she would assume that these people had no money yet they were standing in the bank.
- **Say What?** An African American individual started to walk in front of us. He was coming toward us and we could see that his dress was not very collegelike; he seemed to be in his mid-20s and did not seem to go to college. My friend was holding my left hand as the individual passed that side. As he moved closer, she proceeded to walk to the other side of me and squeeze tightly my left hand. The response that the individual took was to move into the street.

## REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between intergroup and inter-individual interaction, as defined in the chapter? Why does this distinction matter for intercultural communication?
2. Do ingroups shift depending on which is salient at a given time or are they fixed regardless of context? Explain your answer by using and extending examples from the chapter.
3. How do people use labels to differentiate between ingroups and outgroups?
4. In your own words, explain social identity theory using one of the examples discussed in the chapter.
5. Why might categorization threat and identity denial discussed in the chapter relate to the concept of face discussed earlier in the text?
6. Choose an example from an earlier chapter in the text. Explain how the concept of intergroup boundaries defined in this chapter applies.
7. When are the subdimensions of group vitality been particularly relevant? Provide an example and explain based on the discussion in the chapter.
8. Where does media fit in the model of accommodative processes provided in the chapter? Why is this an appropriate place for it in a model about accommodation?
9. Based on the discussion throughout the chapter, create a list of the characteristics we tend to assign to ingroup members and what characteristics we tend to assign to outgroups, regardless of which particular culture either represents.
10. The chapter discusses intergroup interaction in neither a positive or negative way, though some of the examples demonstrate both. Why is this neutral stance taken?

## KEY TERMS

accommodative dilemma 157	ethnophaulism 147	intergroup communication perspective 141
accommodative move 155	group vitality 150	intergroup contact 157
categorization threat 147	identity denial 147	intergroup interaction 141
communication accommodation theory 154	individuating information 141	intergroup status hierarchy 147
demographic 153	infrahumanization effect 156	inter-individual interaction 141
ethnolinguistic identity theory 151	ingroup 142	language suicide 152
ethnonym 148	institutional support 153	linguistic intergroup bias 148
	intergroup boundary 146	

linguistic landscape	154	permeability of intergroup boundaries	146	Social identity theory	144
linguistic shibboleth	144	retroactive speech halo effect	155	status	152
outgroup	142			subjective group vitality	151

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