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Social identity

What's it about?

(Social Psychology pp. 190–229)

By observing other group members in what they do, we learn what characteristics are associated with groups. Knowledge about group membership is activated by direct reminders of membership, the presence of out-group members, being a minority, and conflict or rivalry between groups.

A group's typical characteristics become norms for one's behavior when seeing oneself as a group member. People evaluate their in-group as more positive than other groups because they are motivated to derive positive self-esteem from their group memberships. In-group favoritism is accompanied by out-group derogation when the in-group feels threatened by an out-group. People perceive the out-group as "all alike." This can be explained by lack of familiarity, the constrained nature of interactions, and the focus on characteristics that make people unique from others.

Awareness of other people's prejudice about the abilities of a group's members causes **stereotype threat**, which harms performance. Belonging to a negatively stereotyped group also poses a threat to self-esteem. One can defend one's individual self-esteem by using attributions to advantage, and by making the most of intragroup comparisons. When these strategies are insufficient, people may turn to long-term solutions involving **individual mobility**, **social creativity**, or **social change**.

Chapter topics

- Categorizing oneself as a group member (*pp. 192–196*)
- Me, you, and them: Effects of social categorization (*pp. 196–210*)
- When group memberships are negative (*pp. 211–229*)

CATEGORIZING ONESELF AS A GROUP MEMBER

Ask yourself

- How do we learn what characteristics are associated with groups?
- How does knowledge about a group become activated?
- How do differences between cultures and individuals affect the accessibility of group membership?

What you need to know

LEARNING ABOUT OUR GROUPS (<i>SP pp. 192–193</i>)
FEELING LIKE A GROUP MEMBER (<i>SP pp. 193–195</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Direct reminders of membership• Presence of out-group members• Being a minority• Conflict or rivalry• Cultural differences in the importance of group membership

Self-categorization is the process of seeing oneself as a member of a social group.

The way we feel about the group membership that we share is termed **social identity**.

Social identity theory describes the way people seek to derive positive self-esteem from their group memberships.

CASE STUDY: Racial identification is tied to happiness [see ch06-CS-01.doc]

Weblink: More information about the social identity theory

www.tcw.utwente.nl/theorieenoverzicht/Theory%20clusters/Interpersonal%20Communication%20and%20Relations/Social_Identity_Theory.doc/

Learning About Our Groups

(*SP pp. 192–193*)

We learn about groups by lessons from parents, teachers, peers, and the media.

But most importantly we learn by observing other group members in what they do. Performing a role based on group membership can shape behaviors and self-knowledge. What we and other group members do, in turn, influences our group stereotypes.

RESEARCH ACTIVITY: Kids will be kids [see ch06-RA-01.doc]

FEELING LIKE A GROUP MEMBER

(SP pp. 193–196)

Direct reminders of membership

Labels can activate knowledge about group membership.

More subtle ways to activate group membership are (a) circumstances that remind us of similarities with others; (b) the mere presence of other in-group members; and (c) highlighted group similarities.

Presence of out-group members

The presence of out-group members can activate knowledge about group membership. This is demonstrated by Marques, Yzerbyt, and Rijsman (1988); the presence of a single out-group member is sufficient to increase our focus on in-group membership (SP p. 194)

Weblink: An example of forced acculturation

<http://thinkprogress.org/justice/2012/09/28/925131/maine-mayor-loses-it-tells-immigrants-you-have-to-accept-our-culture/>

Being a minority

When out-group members outnumber the in-group, the minority are more likely to base their self-esteem on the performance of another in-group member.

Conflict or rivalry

Conflict or rivalry between groups is the most potent factor that activates group membership.

Weblink: In-group bias: Start 'em young
www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/22/emma-burton-kansas-fan_n_1371020.html?ref=topbar

Cultural differences in the importance of group membership

Cultural differences can affect whether people tend to see themselves as members of larger groups or categories (interdependent cultures), or see themselves as individuals (independent cultures).

However, even in individualistic cultures, group memberships influences the way people think about themselves and others.

So what does this mean?

Group membership can turn into a **social identity** that links people with others, when the group becomes a significant part of a person's self-concept through the process of **self-categorization**.

By observing other group members in what they do, we learn what characteristics are associated with groups. Knowledge about group membership is activated by direct reminders of membership (labels, circumstances that remind us of similarities with others, the mere presence of other in-group members, and highlighted group similarities), the presence of out-group members, being a minority, and conflict or rivalry between groups. Cultural differences can affect whether people tend to see themselves as members of larger groups or categories, or see themselves as individuals.

ME, YOU, AND THEM: EFFECTS OF SOCIAL CATEGORIZATION

Ask yourself

- How can group membership help us to define ourselves?
- How can group membership connect us with others?
- What are the conditions for out-group hostility?

What you need to know

<p>“I” BECOMES “WE”: SOCIAL CATEGORIZATION AND THE SELF (<i>SP pp. 197–199</i>)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Seeing oneself as a group member• Liking ourselves: Social identity and self-esteem• Social identity and emotions• Balancing individuality and connectedness
<p>OTHERS BECOME “WE”: SOCIAL CATEGORIZATION AND THE IN-GROUP (<i>SP pp. 199–203</i>)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Perceiving fellow in-group members• Liking in-group members: To be us is to be lovable• Treating the in-group right: Justice and altruism
<p>OTHERS BECOME “THEY”: SOCIAL CATEGORIZATION AND THE OUT-GROUP (<i>SP pp. 203–211</i>)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Perceiving the out-group as homogeneous: “They’re all alike!”• Out-group homogeneity in eyewitness identification• Effects of mere categorization: Minimal groups• Discrimination and social identity• Effects of perceived mild threat• Effects of perceived extreme threat: Moral exclusion and hate crimes

Group memberships help us to define ourselves, connect us with other in-group members, and divide us from out-group members

“I” Becomes “We”: Social Categorization and the Self

(*SP pp. 197–199*)

Seeing oneself as a group member

A group’s typical characteristics become norms or standards for one’s behavior when seeing oneself as a group member.

Mackie (1986) [[DOI:10.1037/0022-3514.50.4.720](https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.50.4.720)] demonstrated that people come to think in group-typical ways.

People who identify more strongly with their group see themselves as a more typical group member. This was demonstrated by Spears, Doosje, and Ellemers (1997)

[[DOI:10.1177/0146167297235009](https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167297235009)].

Liking ourselves: Social identity and self-esteem

People strive for positive self-esteem. This self-esteem can be influenced by group memberships; a positive group membership raises self-esteem.

This tendency to bask in the reflected glory (**BIRG**) of positive group identification can be a way of restoring positive self-regard, particularly when the self-esteem is threatened.

Social identity and emotions

People experience emotions in response to events that affect individuals in their groups when reminded of their common identity with these individuals. This was demonstrated by Gordijn et al. (2001) [[DOI:10.1177/1368430201004004002](https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430201004004002)].

People experience these group-based emotions because the group is part of the self.

Balancing individuality and connectedness

Group membership can satisfy the need for both individuality and connectedness. Perceived differences between our group and the out-group satisfy the need for individuality, while perceived similarities between ourselves and other members of the in-group satisfy the need for connectedness. People have the best balance in relatively small groups (see *SP p. 199*).

Others Become “We”: Social Categorization and the In-Group

(SP pp. 199–203)

Perceiving fellow in-group members

When group membership is accessible, we think about features we share with the group. The more accessible the group membership is, the more assumed similarity we perceive.

We also learn a lot about other in-group members’ unique characteristics. When group membership is not accessible, we even see the group as quite diverse. This learning about each other’s personalities, passions, and preferences helps us find our own place in the group.

Liking in-group members: To be us is to be lovable

Because the group is part of the self, we like in-group members more than out-group members. This liking depends merely on the knowledge of shared group membership. Evaluating the in-group as more positive and desirable than other groups occurs even when assigned to groups on a trivial or random basis.

“We” has positive connotations; the word “we” automatically activates positive associations. This was demonstrated by Perdue et al. (1990) [[DOI:10.1037/0022-3514.59.3.475](https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.59.3.475)].

A linguistic bias exists when people describe actions of in-group and out-group members. When the behavior is expected (positive behavior by in-group members and negative behavior by out-group members), the language used to describe the behavior is more abstract, implicitly casting the behavior as generalizable, and linking the behavior to characteristics. However, when the behavior is unexpected (negative behavior by in-group members, positive behavior by out-group members), more concrete language is used, which implicitly casts the behavior as ungeneralizable and an isolated specific occurrence that is an exception to the rule.

RESEARCH ACTIVITY: Linguistic bias [[see ch06-RA-02.doc](#)]

Treating the in-group right: Justice and altruism

When people become lovable and similar to us because of group membership, we want what is best for them. Perceived individual and group interests merge when group membership is activated. This constitutes a basis for fair and altruistic behavior.

Others Become “They”: Social Categorization and the Out-Group

(SP pp. 203–211)

Perceiving the out-group as homogeneous: “They’re all alike!”

The tendency to perceive out-group members as “they are all alike” compared to the in-group is called the **out-group homogeneity effect**.

RESEARCH ACTIVITY: Out-group homogeneity effect [see ch06-RA-03.doc]

This effect can be explained by three important potential factors. The first is lack of familiarity with the out-group; we know more in-group than out-group members, and are therefore more aware of the diversity of our own group members.

The second factor is the constrained nature of interactions with out-group members; interactions with out-group members do not often involve individual interaction, unlike interactions with in-group members.

The final important potential factor is that people focus on characteristics that make them different and unique from others. Regarding out-group members, this difference is quite obvious; group-defining characteristics of out-group members differ from our own characteristics. Regarding in-group members, we have to look deeper to find differentiating characteristics. This is demonstrated by Park and Rothbart (1982) [[DOI:10.1037/0022-3514.42.6.1051](https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.42.6.1051)], who showed that more personal details are remembered about same-sex individuals than about opposite-sex individuals (see SP p. 201).

Not all groups see the out-group as more homogeneous; when the in-group is a minority, it tends to be perceived as more homogeneous. This can be explained by

familiarity with the out-group; minority-group members may know even more out-group than in-group members.

Minority status can also increase the *actual* variability of groups. Unequal power and differences in accessibility of group membership cause members of a group to act in more uniform and homogeneous ways (see SP p. 203).

Out-group homogeneity in eyewitness identification

People also perceive out-group members as “looking all alike.” The effect that people can recognize faces of their own ethnic in-group members more easily than faces of other ethnicity groups is termed the *cross-race identification bias*. Identification accuracy grows with familiarity.

Effects of mere categorization: Minimal groups

Negative stereotypes, mutual ignorance and fear, distribution of resources, and a history of conflict can explain ethnic conflicts. However, discrimination can occur even in a **minimal intergroup situation**. In this situation individuals are randomly assigned to groups without defining group characteristics, without knowing other in-group or out-group members, without a basis for stereotypes, and without a history of conflict or antagonism.

Weblink: More information about the minimum group theory

www.sociallypsyched.org/item/minimal-group-paradigm

Discrimination and social identity

Participants favor the in-group over the out-group even when it costs the in-group in absolute terms.

The favoritism of the in-group over the out-group can be explained by *social identity theory*. This theory argues that people are motivated to derive positive self-esteem from their group memberships. Preferring the in-group to the out-group is a way of feeling good about ourselves. It has been consistently demonstrated that people’s self-esteem is increased when discriminating against the out-group (see p. 204).

Effects of perceived mild threat

Threats to groups trigger discrimination.

Higher status groups tend to discriminate on dimensions relevant to the group's distinction, while lower status groups discriminate on less directly relevant dimensions.

Unequal status amplifies discrimination and felt emotions.

Effects of perceived extreme threat: Moral exclusion and hate crimes

When people perceive threats of an out-group to their in-group: (a) they exalt in in-group symbols and values, and (b) they derogate, hate, and attack the out-group. So in-group favoritism is accompanied by out-group derogation when the in-group feels threatened by an out-group.

Judging the out-group by in-group standards leads to out-group failure, which is used to justify derogation.

Discriminatory behavior can become extreme when the out-group is morally excluded; meaning that rules of justice and civility do not apply to out-group members. The out-group is then perceived as fundamentally inferior to the in-group. Group members reject personal responsibility for their hateful acts. They rationalize their behavior by the thought that the out-group brought it on themselves, and appeal to the in-group's welfare as a source of higher moral authority.

Weblink: *Voices of the Holocaust*

www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/voices/holocaust.html

So what does this mean?

A group's typical characteristics become norms for one's behavior when seeing oneself as a group member. People evaluate their in-group as more positive than other groups because, according to **social identity theory**, people are motivated to derive positive self-esteem from their group memberships. This can occur even in a **minimal intergroup situation**. In-group favoritism is accompanied by out-group derogation

when the in-group feels threatened by an out-group. People perceive the out-group as homogeneous (**out-group homogeneity effect**). This effect can be explained by lack of familiarity, the constrained nature of interactions, and the focus on characteristics that make people unique from others.

THEY DON'T LIKE US: CONSEQUENCES OF BELONGING TO NEGATIVELY PERCEIVED GROUPS

Ask yourself

- What are the effects of stigmatized group membership?
- What can group members do to overcome or escape stigmatization?

What you need to know

WE ARE STIGMATIZED: EFFECTS ON WHAT WE DO AND HOW WE FEEL (<i>SP pp. 212–216</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Effects on performance• Effects on self-esteem
DEFENDING INDIVIDUAL SELF-ESTEEM (<i>SP pp. 216–217</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Using attributions to advantage• Attributional ambiguity in the workplace• Making the most of intragroup comparisons
INDIVIDUAL MOBILITY: ESCAPING NEGATIVE GROUP MEMBERSHIP (<i>SP pp. 218–221</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Disidentification: Putting the group at a psychological distance• Dissociation: Putting the group at a physical distance
SOCIAL CREATIVITY: REDEFINING GROUP MEMBERSHIP AS POSITIVE (<i>SP pp. 221–222</i>)
SOCIAL CHANGE: CHANGING THE INTERGROUP CONTEXT (<i>SP pp. 222–225</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Social competition• Social competition or prejudice reduction: Mutually exclusive goals?
ONE GOAL, MANY STRATEGIES (<i>pp. 225–227</i>)

WE ARE STIGMATIZED: EFFECTS ON WHAT WE DO AND HOW WE FEEL (*SP pp. 212–216*)

Effects on performance

Negative stereotypes about the abilities of a group's members cause **stereotype threat**, and can serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The knowledge of people's prejudice activates the stereotype, which results in anxiety and worries about the impact of failure on the group as a whole. This undermines performance. This is demonstrated by Steele and Aronson (1995) [[DOI:10.1037/0022-3514.69.5.797](https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.69.5.797)], who showed that stereotype threat harms performance.

RESEARCH ACTIVITY How does it feel to be stigmatized? [see ch06-RA-04.doc]

CASE STUDY: The lasting effects of stigma [see ch06-CS-02.doc]

Stereotype threat and its effects on performance can be reduced when there are external excuses available for possible poor performance, when individuals can focus on other identities, or when a role model exemplifying high performance by members of the stereotyped group is present.

CASE STUDY: See me as female, not as Asian [see ch06-CS-03.doc]

Effects on self-esteem

Belonging to a negatively stereotyped group poses a threat to self-esteem, because group membership contributes directly to one's individual self-identity. This was demonstrated by Luhtanen et al. (1991) (see SP p. 215).

Weblink: The doll study today

www.cnn.com/2010/US/05/19/doll.study.reactions/index.html

Defending Individual Self-Esteem

(SP pp. 216–218)

Being stigmatized does not always lead to lowered self-esteem: When stigmatized, people can attribute negative reactions to prejudice, or when they compare themselves to fellow in-group members, their self-esteem is not lowered.

Using attributions to advantage

By attributing negative outcomes to prejudice against one's group rather than to personal failings, one can protect self-esteem against the negative effects of failure. This has been demonstrated by Crandall et al. (2000) [[DOI:10.1002/\(SICI\)1099-0992\(200005/06\)30:3<355::AID-EJSP995>3.0.CO;2-M](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1099-0992(200005/06)30:3<355::AID-EJSP995>3.0.CO;2-M)], see p. 216.

However, attributing negative outcomes to prejudice has its costs. Negative feedback is sometimes realistic, so should not be discounted. Discounting may also breed a sense of hopelessness and loss of control. In addition, attributing one's failure to being stereotyped may cause people to see you as a complainer, which leads to social rejection. Finally, trust in positive feedback is also destroyed when this feedback is attributed to "appearing unprejudiced" or as being given "out of sympathy."

Attributional ambiguity in the workplace

Feedback that can be ambiguously attributed can create workplace problems like not trusting others, and suspicion of being a token.

These negative effects can be overcome when the role of merit is emphasized.

Making the most of intragroup comparisons

Comparing oneself with one's in-group members is typical of minority groups. Intragroup comparisons boost one's self-esteem when better off than others, or remind one of in-group members that are doing well.

Individual Mobility: Escaping Negative Group Membership

(SP pp. 218–221)

Individual mobility is a strategy one can turn to when other strategies intended to buffer self-esteem are ineffective. This strategy involves individual escape from membership in a negative group, either through disidentification or through dissociation. Individual mobility is preferred to **social creativity** when group boundaries are permeable.

Disidentification: Putting the group at a psychological distance

Disidentification entails minimizing personal connections to the group. One can disidentify by avoiding reminders of membership in a stigmatized group, by publicly criticizing and devaluating an in-group member's poor performance (the black sheep effect), or by considering oneself to be an exception rather than a typical group member.

A potential cost of disidentification is that people who play down their group membership risk negative responses from others.

Dissociation: Putting the group at a physical distance

Dissociating is the act of escaping from a negatively stereotyped group; casting off one's old identity and becoming a member of a new group. The benefits include freedom from discrimination, but the potential costs are isolation when not being accepted by the new group, or other dangers that are associated with the new group. In addition, you give up the opportunity to influence others' thinking about their group.

CASE STUDY: You don't know me: Hiding your true self at work [see ch06-CS-04.doc]

Weblink: Becoming American: The Chinese experience
www.pbs.org/becomingamerican/

Social Creativity: Redefining Group Membership as Positive

(SP pp. 221–212)

One can redefine group characteristics in positive terms in order to attempt to change society's evaluations of this group. This can be done by introducing and emphasizing alternative dimensions on which the group is superior. These kinds of **social creativity** strategies are used more when group boundaries are relatively fixed.

Sometimes social creativity may unintentionally provide rationales and justification for continued exclusion. Then the final strategy is **social change**.

Social Change: Changing the Intergroup Context

(*SP pp. 222–225*)

Social change strategy refers to the strategy to improve the overall societal situation by confronting and challenging the hierarchy of group domination.

This strategy is preferred by people who identify strongly with their group, and see individual mobility as impossible.

CASE STUDY: It gets better: Providing support to targets of prejudice [see ch06-CS-05.doc]

Social competition

Engaging in social competition means taking direct action to improve the relative position, status, power, and resources of the in-group. However this strategy leads the other group to perceive this group as threatening, resulting in increased levels of prejudice and discrimination. Engaging in social competition is most effective when group members stick together.

Social competition or prejudice reduction: Mutually exclusive goals?

Cross-categorization refers to a situation where out-group members on one dimension are in-group members on the other dimension. This cannot reduce prejudice, but redirects it; double out-group members are evaluated even more negatively.

Another form of recategorization is forming a new inclusive in-group from which self-esteem and identity can be derived.

CASE STUDY: Changing the definition of in-group [see ch06-CS-06.doc]

The color-blindness ideology holds that race should not affect the way people are treated, and should therefore be disregarded and even actively ignored.

This ideology fits with the emphasis on individual achievement, and the concern that emphasizing group differences may foster in-group hostility and prejudice.

However, the color-blindness perspective may just succeed in distracting attention from group differences; it does not necessarily lead to intergroup acceptance. In addition, acknowledging intergroup differences does not inevitably lead to enhanced intergroup bias.

One disadvantage of the color-blindness approach is that people do not get to know other cultures, and do not learn to live and work alongside culturally different individuals. Another disadvantage is that it denies an important social identity, and desensitizes the majority group to the value that group membership has for minority groups.

The solution to these problems is a balance: Members from different groups can share common goals, while simultaneously maintaining their own social identity.

Weblink: Pretending not to notice race http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sam-sommers/what-does-it-really-mean-_b_875852.html

One Goal, Many Strategies

(SP pp. 222–224)

No single approach is uniformly the best strategy. Different groups tend to prefer different strategies. The most important factors that affect strategy choice are strength of group identification, and perceptions of the possibility of individual mobility. Individuals are less likely to seek individual mobility when they identify strongly with their low-status group, or perceive the possibilities of individual mobility as low.

So what does this mean?

Awareness of other people's prejudice about the abilities of a group's members causes **stereotype threat**, which harms performance. This can be reduced when there are external excuses available, or when a role model is present. Belonging to a negatively stereotyped group also poses a threat to self-esteem. One can defend one's individual

self-esteem by using attributions to advantage, and making the most of intragroup comparisons. When these strategies are insufficient, people may turn to long-term solutions involving **individual mobility** (disidentification or dissociation), **social creativity**, or **social change** (social competition, recategorization, color-blindness, or valuing group difference).