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## Made In America

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*And now the telling of...*

## Made in America

Lauren N. Ramirez & Sue J. Oh

*Assigned in COM 513: Advanced Intercultural Communication (Dr. Choi)*

### Introduction

Respected universities across the nation have students participating in "Greek Life." At the beginning of each semester, it is customary for these Greek Student Life organizations to hold recruitment events. Each organization creates a theme for its recruitment period, and these themes are advertised all around the campus in hopes of catching a potential recruit's eye. A common method of "advertisement" at Pepperdine University during this period is painting "The Rock" in the center of our university's Main Campus. The third week of the Fall 2017 semester, The Rock was painted boldly in red, white, and blue, reading "Made In America," incorporating the Delta Delta Delta (Tri-Delta) Greek letters. Normally, this would have been brushed off as an ignorant microaggression, but due to the timing coinciding with the Trump administration administering the Muslim Ban and rescinding the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) legislation, it communicated strongly xenophobic beliefs. The clear America-first message the Tri-Delta group projected (whether intentionally or not) promoted the idea that people from other countries are not fit to be members of the group. This phrase ostracized the twenty-two percent of international students who identify with different nationalities and the even larger percentage of students who have family and friends who were not "Made in America." After sharing our concerns with the head of recruitment about the implications of their slogan, she justified the phrase by explaining it was "fun and more likely to draw people in."

The Social Identity Theory (SIT) allows us to understand how our respective group identifications led us to different interpretations of the "Made In America" mural. As children of

immigrants, we found a seemingly harmless tagline attacking our community and its progress. Her affiliation with a primarily White American sorority, and our affiliation with a community of people of color (POC), has shaped the way we understand our environment and ourselves. The Tri-Delta group had no issues promoting a dominant, preeminent view of America, and in turn, an inadequate, deficient view of all other countries. Americans' grandiose perceptions of and undying devotion to our country hinder our communication with people who break the status quo of "American." Using the Social Identity Theory, we analyze the pillars that hold up the "traditional" American facade, and how individuals' negative interactions with members of perceived other nationalities encourages racially discriminatory tendencies.

### What is an American?

Understanding what constitutes an "American" is important in the analysis of why "traditional" American citizens treat other citizens as if they were not from America. According to Schildkraut (2007), the traditions that make up the American identity are liberal tradition, civic republican tradition, ethnocultural tradition, and incorporationism tradition. The liberal tradition, the most historically accepted tradition, creates the image of an individual that believes in economic rights, individual freedoms, and lives out the American Dream through their hard work (Schildkraut, 2007). The civic republican tradition outlines an individual who is committed in their participation to their political community (Schildkraut, 2007).

Another set of "norms," however contested, is the ethnocultural tradition, which ascribes Americans to be, "White, English-speaking

Protestants of northern European ancestry" (Schildkraut, 2007, p.599). Schildkraut (2007) makes an important note that even those who consciously reject this image of a "traditional" American still subconsciously operate under the same assumptions. Schildkraut (2007) shares the example of an American asking a fellow Asian American, "Where are you from?" because his/her physical appearance does not match the pervasive "norm" of only White being American. For the sake of this paper, we will refer to this "out-group" of non-White Anglo-Saxon American citizens as "Questioned Americans." Incorporationism tradition, newer to the American identity, states that the United States is made up of immigrants who are in the process of assimilating to American culture (Schildkraut, 2007).

These often-competing traditions have been embedded within the consciousness of all Americans regardless of ethnicity, essentially forming the image of what an American looks like; if not physically White, then engaging in the process of becoming White through hard work, political fluency, and navigating different cultures (Schildkraut, 2007). When this image does not perfectly match up with the individual in contact then the infamous question, "Where are you from?" is asked. This treatment is relevant in exploring how Americans define themselves and how that affects their treatment of others.

### **Social Identity Theory**

Social Identity Theory (SIT) is commonly linked to "organizational identification," the process of structuring one's identity based on the organizations one is involved with (Scott, 2007). SIT is related to communication in the sense that one must communicate with others to gauge how a certain group is viewed in society. By learning how a collective is portrayed, one can weigh the costs and benefits of being a member of that group and determine if s/he wants to maintain that identity. Scott (2007) refers to Hogg and Terry's pioneering depiction of SIT when he mentions that SIT is split into two main branches: categorization and self-enhancement.

### **Categorization**

Scott (2007) defines categorization as a tool used to identify group membership and its boundaries. This tool often relies on shared social categorizations such as race, gender, age, and various other situationally accessible qualities (Hog, 2006). This cognitive differentiation is visible within the study conducted by Newman, Hartman, and Taber (2012). This study tracked encounters between English speaking Americans and non-English speaking immigrants and found that this barrier to communication elicited a sense of a cultural threat within the English-speaking individuals (Newman, Hartman, & Taber, 2012). This identity threat led to greater anti-immigration policies and gave greater support of the segregation within neighborhoods and the workplace (Newman, Hartman, & Taber, 2012). This research confirms the theory that individuals must be psychologically salient in order to effectively communicate (Hog, 2006).

### **Self-Enhancement**

Self-enhancement, as described by Scott (2007), is the idea that members will look for traits that strengthen their in-group, and in turn, enhance the individual. If a group is first-rate, then the members within the group must also be viewed in a similar light. Negy, Jensen, and Uddin's (2003) research supports the theory that generally, when people learn more about the group they identify with, they become more ethnocentric, or see their group more positively than others. This mentality naturally occurs from judging other groups based on principles formed by their own group. Eventually, this leads to prejudice, and every difference serves as a reason to see other groups as inferior and substandard (Negy, Jensen, and Uddin, 2003). The research shows that there is a positive correlation between the amount of knowledge individuals have about their group and their ethnocentrism, self-esteem, and group-identity scores (Negy, Jensen, and Uddin, 2003).

### **Group Vitalities**

#### **Objective Vitalities**

SIT states that an individual is always

striving for positive group identity, or high vitality, which refers to their positionality within society (Abrams & Giles, 2009). Their objective positionality, or vitality, is dependent on three categories: status, demography, and institutional support (Abrams & Giles, 2007).

Status is comprised of four factors: economic, social, sociohistorical, and language. The economic status of an individual is dependent on the “degree of control” that an individual has over his/her financial life (Abram, Barker, Giles, 2009, p. 61). Social status is based on the “degree of esteem” that a group attributes to itself (Abram, Barker, Giles, 2009, p. 61). Sociohistorical status is rooted in the degree of pride or shame in a group's history. Finally, the status of language is the degree of “prestige” that the language holds (Abram, Barker, Giles, 2009, p. 61). A group possesses high status if they have high degrees of these categories (Abram, Barker, Giles, 2009).

An elevated identity can also be a result of demography. Demography, which is the statistic of births, deaths, and marriages of the in-group, is significant in increasing group vitality because of the “notion of strength in numbers” (Abram, Barker, Giles, 2007, p. 120). The number of individuals in the in-group is relevant when it comes to levels of institutional representation. High institutional support derives from high formal and informal representation in one's homeland via the governmental, mass media, educational, religious, and cultural spheres (Abrams & Giles, 2007). More so than institutional representation, mass media has played an unparalleled role in forming vitality perceptions (Abrams & Giles, 2007). Abrams and Giles (2007) specifically highlight television's role as an influencer. Television has the power to connect with a broad audience, create a cultural narrative, and present content that an individual would otherwise have never experienced (Abrams & Giles, 2007). These constructions inform audiences on their own group vitalities (Abrams & Giles, 2007). If there is a positive correlation between representation and group identity, then the same group will attain not only higher objective vitality in representation, but also in subjective vitality (Abram, Barker, Giles, 2007, p.120).

### **Subjective Vitalities**

Subjective vitality is an individual's personal assessment of their group's vitality in comparison to other groups' (Abram, Giles, 2007). Groups differentiate themselves by using objective vitalities to justify their subjective vitalities. For example, Koskenniemi's (2016) analysis of James Lorimer, a White lawyer in the nineteenth century who practiced “natural law,” reveals that his justification of Europeans as superior than other nationalities was solely based on his comparison of wealth and moral values.

Lorimer specifically categorized Turkey, Africa, and the Arab states into three groups: civilized, barbarian, and savage. Based off this hierarchical division, advocated for each country to abide by distinct international laws (Koskenniemi, 2016). Lorimer's motivation for pursuing this course of action was to establish European states and values as superior.

The self-enhancement portion of the SIT explains that Lorimer's need to depict Europe in the most positive light and degrade the status of non-European countries is a result of his membership with the European culture (Sets & Burke, 2000). In Lorimer's case, he used a combination of objective and subjective tools to argue his stance that European countries should be held to a different set of international rules than more “inferior” countries. The most compelling objective tool he used was the wealth of a country, similar to the modern-day GDP. Besides the “value” of a country, most of Lorimer's argument relied on subjective “evidences,” such as moral values of a society. His argument relied on the idea that a country's financial success was directly dependent on its moral values, which was not supported by any research at the time. Lorimer's case is a perfect example of how grouping people into ingroups and out-groups are detrimental to the development of a society.

### **Satisfaction Levels**

Within SIT, satisfaction levels are commonly assessed in groups to see how content people are in their intercultural interactions. For instance, a way that Americans commonly express

their satisfaction levels is through contentious policy issues. "Language policy, immigration policy, and government spending on race-related programs" (Schildkraut, 2007, p.598) are all examples of how Americans see themselves and the (lack of) need to accommodate for Questioned Americans. Depending on the Americans' satisfaction levels with Questioned Americans, they will support policies that either benefit or hinder the rights and opportunities of Questioned Americans.

Brown (2000) reports that two major methods in which members of a group show their satisfaction levels is by leaving their group, or finding ways to change the aspect of the group that they are unsatisfied with. One example relevant to California is the section under Title VI (the Civil Rights Act) regarding language rights in hospitals. Every patient has the right to an interpreter every time they receive health care and every patient has the right to written information in their own language, as a result of pressure from local communities (OPA, 2015). In this instance, Americans were unsatisfied with their intercultural communication approach, and decided to change the situation.

### **Rationale**

The phenomenon under analysis is Americans' willingness to communicate with fellow Americans who do not fit the dominant view of Americans. The motivation behind our experiment was to answer whether affiliation and knowledge of culture has an effect on our interactions with Questioned Americans. This lack of willingness to communicate with Americans who practice other cultures promotes the concept of "accidental racism," more commonly referred to as "microaggressions." This exists even within highly educated & "diverse" communities such as Pepperdine, as demonstrated by the "Made In America" rock design.

The liberal tradition, civic republican tradition, ethnocultural tradition, and incorporationism tradition are the main frameworks that Schildkraut (2007) uses in attempt to define what a modern-day "American" is. These four traditions create the "perfect" American as

one who attains economic success through hard work, is politically involved, is a White English-speaking Protestant who immigrated from Europe, and is quickly assimilating into American society (Schildkraut, 2007).

In his explanation of SIT, Scott (2007) splits the theory into two different sections.

Categorization is essentially the idea that people put themselves into groups where they feel they have similarities with others. These groups or "categories" are often socially constructed groups with differentiating factors such as age, gender, and race (Hogg, 2006). Self-Enhancement, the second section that Scott (2007) uses, states that people within a group will try to differentiate their group from the others as much as possible. Eventually, each differing factor between the in-group and the out-groups will be seen as sufficient criteria to devalue the out-groups. Through the lens of self-enhancement, we can easily see how an ethnocentric mentality can develop in one's mind. Ethnocentrism is simply the belief that one's group is better than all others, usually based in subjective reasoning. SIT goes further to claim that once an individual learns more about the group they identify with, their sense of ethnocentrism (pride for their own group, as well as a demeaning view of other groups) along with their individualistic self-esteems will increase (Scott, 2007).

The theme of ethnocentrism carries on into the discussion about vitalities. The Self-Enhancement idea is further developed in the understanding of the relationship between subjective and objective vitalities. Subjective vitalities are often the claims that in-groups use to support the assumption that their group is better than others. While subjective vitalities are based on standards created by the in-group, the in-groups try to validate their judgment of other groups based on "objective vitalities." Objective vitalities are composed of status, demography, and institutional support (Abrams & Giles, 2007).

Being American has been traditionally defined in ways that no longer represent the true demography of America. Americans' affiliation and perception of our country negatively affect our communication with people from different cultures

in America. An individual is always striving for positive group identity in an attempt to raise his or her own social standing. In identifying ethnocentrism as the cause, we will be able to reduce the symptoms that we see later on.

While some members of the population may not acknowledge microaggressions as a “serious” problem in our society, Schildkraut (2007) and Brown (2000), explore the concept of social satisfaction within groups. High levels of satisfaction show that a group is content with their involvement and role in a society, whereas low levels of satisfaction show that a group wants changes of their group’s communication in the society. We have developed an experiment to test two hypotheses from the research: “Those with high categorization will have lower satisfaction with the ‘Questioned American’ conversation than the stereotypical American conversation,” and subsequently, “Those with low categorization will have higher satisfaction with the ‘Questioned American’ than the stereotypical American conversation.”

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this quantitative study will be to determine whether there is a correlation between Americans’ level of national identity and their willingness to communicate with ‘Questioned Americans.’ We will implement an experimental, quantitative method approach for our research. We chose to use a quantitative study to gather data from a large population of people to see the general consensus of Americans, rather than focus on specific individual cases. This research is essential to prevent growing hostile racial tensions between Americans. We will recruit ten participants from each state and ten participants from each continent (America being excluded from the North American group). We will have a random selection of participants who fit the following criteria: eighteen years or older, fluent in English, American citizenship. From this sample, we hope to have a group of people in which all academic levels; income brackets, political parties, genders, religions, and races are represented. The people will be selected through a process called “random digit dialing” (RDD), in which we contact people

through randomly generated phone numbers with a specific area code. This cost-efficient process has the advantage of reaching people who are normally unlisted in phone books, and offers coverage a complete geographic area (Suh, 2015). After getting into contact with various people from throughout a state or continent, we will schedule times to meet them at their local libraries or public schools, to conduct our experiments.

After our sample is selected, we will have all the participants complete a survey to self-report their levels of patriotism modeled after the study by Schildkraut (2007). We will be asking our participants’ questions based on the traditions described in “What is American?” All of our questions will have a spectrum with options for participants to rate them as “Very Important,” “Somewhat Important,” or “Not Important At All.” Examples of questions that would measure the Ethnocultural traditions would be; “How important is it to be born in America in order to be a true American?”, “How important is it to be Christian in order to be a true American?”, “How important is it to have European Ancestry in order to be a true American?”, and “How important is it to be White in order to be a true American?” For the Liberalism tradition, we would ask question such as, “How important is it to respect political institutions and laws?”, “How important is it to achieve economic success through hard work?”, and “How important is freedom of speech despite ideological differences?” The Civic Republicanism tradition will be gauged through questions such as, “How important is volunteering in your community?”, “How important is it to feel American?”, “How important is it think of oneself as an American?”, and “How important is it to be informed and involved in local and national politics?”

For the Incorporationism tradition, our questions would include, “How important is it to carry on the cultural traditions of one’s ancestors, such as the language and food?”, “How important is it to respect other people’s cultural differences?”, “How important is it to blend into the larger society?”, and “How important is it to see people of all backgrounds as American?” Additional questions will include, “How important is it to be able to speak English?”, “How important

is it to speak 'traditional' English (without an accent)?", and "How important is it to have American citizenship?"

After the surveys, we would ask the participants to speak to a customer service representative (CSR) with a traditional American accent over the phone. Participants will be given the task of making a reservation at a restaurant of our selection and pre-ordering food for a party of seven. This will force the conversation to be of substantial length, and leave room for error. During this conversation, the participant will be connected to a polygraph that will monitor their physiological responses (breathing rate, pulse, blood pressure, and perspiration) to assess their levels of nervousness and frustration. The data from the polygraphs will be analyzed and reported back to us by a professional polygraphist. In order to reveal subconscious ethnocentrism this process will be repeated with another CSR whose accent would qualify him/her as a Questioned American.

After the phone conversations, the participant will be given another survey that will ask them to rate the satisfaction level of their phone call. Participants will be asked to judge the accuracy of the following claims: "CSR was well-trained," "CSR adhered to professional of conduct," "CSR acted in my best interest," Overall, I am satisfied with the CSR," "The CSR responded to my inquiries in a timely manner" and "The CSR was able to efficiently carry out my request." Our hypothesis stated in our Rationale section will be proven correct or incorrect depending on the differences in physiological responses. Increased or decreased physiological responses between the two calls combined with self-reported satisfaction surveys conducted after the call will reveal whether or not Americans treat Questioned Americans differently.

### Conclusion

SIT states that an individual's sense of self stems from the vitality of the groups that they are affiliated with. As a result, individuals, and by

association, groups, are in constant negotiation with the out-groups in asserting their dominance so as to ensure their success. The Tri Delta sorority, so as to bring in greater recruits, used the sociohistorical status of "Made in America," which communicates ethnocultural traditions, to assert their dominance over the out- group, or those not "made" in America. The design of this rock and defense of its message, despite our concerns combined with the tense political climate, demonstrates the head of recruitment's low willingness to communicate with intercultural Americans. This led us to question whether there was a negative correlation between patriotism and intercultural willingness to communicate.

When we are faced with unintentional discrimination, or microaggressions, we begin to question why our opinions are viewed as less important than those of the traditional Americans. As students of color attending Pepperdine who are deeply connected to communities that have been affected by the anti-immigrant policies and rhetoric, this research has provided us with tools to identify the reasons behind microaggressions, bring about a new approach to entering intercultural conversations, and begin reconstructing what it means to be "American."

This proposed study is important because unchecked interactions with low satisfaction builds and manifests into more deeply cemented ethnocentric communication. Our experimental design will check one of the most common types of intercultural interactions and produce findings that reveal how subconsciously embedded ethnocentric traditions affect our daily interactions with others.

A large-scale example of this ethnocentric phenomenon today is the recent "White nationalist rally" incident in Charlottesville. The participants acted extremely because they felt supported by the current presidential administration and his political party. Awareness of one's affiliations with certain groups and how those groups interact with others could lead to incredible steps toward equality for all co-culture groups in America.

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