

Introduction to Cultural Anthropology: Class 13
Naturalizing inequality: Social race and gender
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- Last time we started looking at how inequality and hierarchies are constructed
 - that is, how people come to accept inequality and hierarchies of wealth, power, status, etc. and consider them natural and normal
 - the two general kinds of theories we looked at, integration theories and exploitation theories, tried to explain why and how inequality and hierarchy were established and expanded
 - integration theories suggest that inequality and hierarchy serve necessary functions, providing for coordination that helps larger groups with more complex subsistence strategies to function and survive
 - exploitation theories suggest that inequality and hierarchy arise because some people try to get ahead at the expense of others
- But we can also look more carefully at the process of establishing those notions of hierarchy in individuals' minds
 - the process of **naturalizing** inequality and hierarchy, that is, that leads us to think that inequality and hierarchy are natural, normal, necessary, acceptable, and right
- Last time we looked at inequality based on class, but there are many other bases for inequality
- For example, in our society, we have inequality based on social race
 - that is, a hierarchy of social races
 - recall that social race is a real categorizing scheme for people, even though it does not accurately fit real biological variation in humans
 - that is, social race categories are just arbitrary social constructs - but influential ones, nonetheless
 - Even if you think overt racism is fading (which is not at all clear), racism is still important in US society
 - last weekend (March 20, 2010), African-American Representatives James Clyburn (D-S.C.) and Emanuel Cleaver (D-Mo.) were called the “n-word” as they walked by Tea Party protesters
 - in the next days, Clyburn got emails and faxes of similar racist abuse, including pictures of nooses and gallows
 - how is the idea that African-Americans are inferior constructed? Why do some people believe it, or tolerate it?
 - the readings in Robbins discuss some history of the concept of races and their supposedly differing abilities
 - showing that even people who thought of themselves as scientists were influenced by cultural constructs about “race”
 - and contributed to maintaining both...
 - the construct of “races” itself
 - and the idea that these “races” differed in cranial capacity and intelligence – whatever that really is
 - this so-called “scientific” racism is (almost) dead in the legitimate scientific community

- so how is “folk” racism constructed and maintained in peoples’ minds?
- Peggy McIntosh addresses part of an answer in her famous 1988 article, *White Privilege*
 - But FIRST: notice that she uses race as a given category, without examining whether it is valid
 - she is referring to *socially constructed* race (white, black, etc.)
 - for her argument, it does not matter if it is "real" biologically
 - people really classify each other this way, whether that is realistic or not
 - so she focuses instead on how the categories of races work in our society
 - McIntosh argues that racism is constructed similarly to sexism
 - US males grant that females are underprivileged, but not that males are over-privileged
 - women earn less for the same work than men do, for example
 - women are underpaid relative to the whole labor pool
 - men earn MORE than women do for the same work
 - men are OVERPAID relative to the whole labor pool
 - but men tend not to think about it that way
 - Key idea: denying male over-privilege allows men to avoid recognizing the unfairness and changing it
 - McIntosh argues that racism is similar
 - whites tend to acknowledge that African-Americans are disadvantaged relative to others
 - but not that whites themselves are over-advantaged in the same ways
 - **white privilege**: unearned assets due to being white
 - benefit whites every day
 - but hidden
 - doors open more easily every day by no virtue of one's own
 - [analogy to my experience as a gringo in Peru]
 - white privilege must remain hidden, because acknowledging it would contradict the ideology of equal opportunity, meritocracy, level playing field
 - that is, acknowledging white privilege exposes a contradiction between our real and our ideal culture
 - ideal culture:
 - equal opportunity
 - level playing field
 - whites have personally earned whatever they have
 - real culture:
 - whites have unearned advantages
 - opportunities are not equal
 - the playing field is not level
 - some of what whites have is due to their social race, not only their own efforts
 - contradictions like this cause **cognitive dissonance**:
 - discomfort, irritation due to encountering that some of ones beliefs are not compatible with each other

- one or more things that one thinks is true, must actually be false
- as in a white American thinking:
 - “I do not participate in racism”
 - “White privilege is real, so I benefit from racism”
 - Uh-oh... one of these must be false...
- one common response to cognitive dissonance is to turn away from the problem and ignore or deny it
 - “what BS, that’s just liberals being politically correct!”
 - “that’s just stuff the professor said in class, it does not apply to my real life!”
 - “forget that, what are you doing this weekend?”
- the tendency to avoid the discomfort of cognitive dissonance is one reason why people tend to deny that racism exists in the US
- “white” is the normal, default, unstated category of Americans... the **unmarked** category
- **marked** and **unmarked** categories
 - an unmarked category is the default category, assumed unless specified otherwise
 - a marked category is a special case that must be specifically indicated
 - consider the word “pig”
 - if you picture a pig, you probably think of a full-grown pig
 - to specify a baby pig, you have to indicate the age specifically by saying “piglet”, “baby pig”, etc.
 - “pig” includes adults and infants, but we assume adult unless otherwise specified
 - so adult pig is the unmarked category: “adult” is assumed unless the phrase is marked to indicate otherwise
 - piglet or baby pig is the marked category: it must be specified as being different from the default, unmarked category
 - if someone says “prime minister”, you probably think of a man
 - it is necessary to say “female prime minister” to bring that image to mind
 - in the field of prime ministers, male is the unmarked category, and female is marked
- why do marked and unmarked categories matter here?
 - because the unmarked category is the one that is assumed, it seems most typical, normal, appropriate...
 - all other categories must be specified as deviations from this norm
 - denying white privilege is made easier by whiteness being the default category:
 - “people advance according to their abilities”
 - that is, normal, typical, people: generally white people
 - but since white is the unmarked category, we don’t have to specify that this refers to white people
 - “black people are at a disadvantage”
 - black people are an exception to the norm, which is generally fair
 - rather than one side of a balance in which the other side has an advantage
 - if there was no unmarked category for social race, we would have to specify the social race whenever we mentioned people

- We would have to say “Non-black people advance according to their abilities...”
- that would make the racism pretty obvious
- hiding contradictions is probably not the purpose of unmarked categories
 - but it certainly is an effect
- is this language *influencing* how we think?
- or language *revealing* how we think?
- how can I claim that white is the unmarked (normal, default) social race and all other social races are deviations from the norm?
 - just listen to the terms:
 - people of color
 - as opposed to colorless people?
 - no, as opposed to everyone else, that is, as opposed to the default category: white
 - ethnic food
 - as opposed to food for people with no ethnicity?
 - no, as opposed to food for people of the default ethnicity: white Americans
 - white ethnicity is such an assumed, normal default that white people may feel...
 - that they have no ethnicity at all
 - that only other groups have ethnic identities
 - From a “CSU Leader” newsletter in 2006:
 - “The ethnicity of bachelor’s and master’s degree earners increased largely across the board in almost all ethnic categories, with the largest increases being in the numbers of Asian Americans and Latinos graduating. Ethnic groups currently make up an increasing majority of students in the CSU”
 - here, “ethnic groups” are opposed to all those students whose ethnicity is the unmarked norm, that is, whites
 - whose ethnicity is the norm, to which all others are contrasted
 - this is because whites have been the majority in most of the US for a long time
 - the most common type becomes the unmarked, typical category
 - but people tend to extend the notion of being the most common type to the notion of being typical, normal, even best or the ideal
 - whites consider their lives to be the norm, and the ideal
 - so helping others means helping them to become more like whites
 - since whites consider themselves the neutral/normal/default category,
 - whites may feel no racial identity
 - whites can feel that racism is not relevant to their lives
 - it seems not to affect them
 - but in fact, it does
 - the effects are positive for whites
 - whites are used to these benefits, so they don't notice them
 - see McIntosh's list of privileges
 - I would add to the list:
 - I can believe that racism is being overcome and will eventually disappear

- which allows me to consider myself a good person who has not benefited unfairly at anyone's expense due to racism
- and allows me to have a hopeful, positive outlook
- whites tend to think of racism only as the negative half - racist acts by individuals
 - since most whites don't think they do "racist" things, they can feel that racism does not affect them
- also, whites tend to think of racism as individual acts
 - whites don't often recognize **systemic racism** - that non-whites lack the benefits whites get just because they are white
- these views of racism help to keep it invisible to whites
 - they protect whites from feeling guilty
 - or having to do anything or giving up some privilege
 - they maintain the racist status quo
 - benefiting those at the top of the racial hierarchy
- to get back to our larger questions about the construction and naturalization of hierarchies:
 - using marked vs. unmarked categories of people helps to hide or ignore racism
 - such as by not recognizing white privilege
 - people's tendency to avoid cognitive dissonance leads them to think in ways that mask and normalize inequality and hierarchy
- Another kind of inequality: based on gender
 - *Society and sex roles* (Friedl 1978)
 - What leads to gender inequality? Why is it greater in some societies than in others?
 - Friedl's article illustrates a different approach
 - Where McIntosh looks at language and thought,
 - Friedl looks for a material (economic) explanation
 - Not mutually exclusive; both kinds of explanation may be right at the same time
 - These are just two of many possible anthropological approaches
 - First, consider the range of gender inequality in known societies
 - No true matriarchies, ever, as far as we can tell
 - Some societies where women were frequently chiefs (African Lovedu) or controlled food production and distribution (Iroquois)
 - But men still held other important roles
 - Women relatively equal, but not dominant in these cases
 - Many societies in which men are dominant
 - Friedl's claim: Power goes to those who control distribution of scarce resources outside the family
 - outside the family = in the public sphere
 - people who control scarce, valued goods in public gain networks of obligations, alliances, prestige that they can call on for cooperation and support
 - Among foragers
 - Men often control distribution of hunted meat
 - They gain reputations, friends, allies...
 - They are then well placed to control trade in other goods

- While plants gathered by women are distributed only within the family
 - so women establish fewer alliances, obligations, less prestige, have fewer people and resources to call on for support, etc.
- Why is labor divided in this way by gender?
 - Childbearing and child care can only be done by women, who can breast feed
 - which inhibits them from hunting, leaving that to men
- Support for Friedl's claim: survey of societies in which men control distribution of scarce resources in public to different degrees
 - Washo: Native American foragers in Sierras around Tahoe
 - males and females collected food together
 - Relatively equal power, freedom of action
 - Hadza: Foragers in Africa, speak a click language related to that of the Ju/'hoansi
 - men and women collect food separately but share little
 - Both gather; large animal kills are rare, shared
 - Still relatively equal power, freedom of action
 - Tiwi: Foragers on Melville and Bathurst Islands, just off the northern coast of Australia
 - men hunt significant meat and bring it back to distribute, women gather for families
 - Males dominant
 - Women must always be married
 - Betrothed at birth, remarried at husband's death
 - Men make alliances by exchanging daughters, sisters, and mothers in marriage
 - Eskimo: a slightly broader term than Inuit; mostly icebound arctic
 - males hunt almost all food and other materials, women process it
 - Extreme inequality
 - Women treated as objects: used, abused, traded by men
- How do the Ju/'hoansi fit into this?
 - which case do they most resemble?
 - could their practices like "insulting the meat" have an effect on gender inequality?
 - is this a cultural construct (about the need to control young men's arrogance) overriding the effect of an economic reality (men bring in the valued meat) on gender roles?
- Applied to our society:
 - As long as
 - women handle spending for supporting the family,
 - while men handle spending on cars, sports, consumer goods they can show to others or talk with others about like computers and large TVs, etc.,
 - women will have less power and recognition
 - Jobs that give women authority over resources (business spending, public policy spending, etc.) advance women's status
 - Friedl would argue that current trends of women increasingly controlling resources in public as consumers, business people, and politicians
 - do not merely *reflect* gender roles that are changing for other reasons
 - instead, these *cause* women's status to become more equal to men's
- Is there another way? Is it possible for a non-foraging society to have social equality?

- Robbins reading about the Hutterites
 - a Christian religious movement related to Amish and Mennonites
 - non-competitive, low-consumption, non-ostentatious ideology
 - based on religious belief
 - children are carefully raised to share the same values
 - family equality in wealth and power
 - but great gender inequality
 - might their system still work without low status for women?
 - why is that necessary?
 - also other drawbacks (from our point of view):
 - limited freedom
 - need to continually “branch” into new colonies, etc.
 - could the Hutterites succeed without the surrounding society that IS highly hierarchical?
 - that is, does their relative equality depend on the inequality of others?