

Introduction to Cultural Anthropology: Class 16  
**Naturalizing inequality: Society, gender, rank, and race**  
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- Inequality
  - We live in an unequal society, stratified by wealth
    - compare stratification of Egypt under Khufu (Cheops), pharaoh who built the Great pyramid at Giza, with the USA today
  - Khufu's Great Pyramid at Giza
    - 230 m square (756 feet)
      - if built on this campus, it would cover Stevenson, Darwin, Salazar hall, the Student Union, the Commons, and most of the main quad
    - 146 meters tall (475 feet)
    - 2.3 million cut sandstone interior blocks, 2.5 tons each
    - estimated 84,000 laborers working 80 days/year for 20 years (about 370,000 person-years!)
    - outside cased in limestone blocks, 16 tons each
    - cost in modern terms:
      - the labor alone at minimum wage (\$5.15/hr current Federal minimum wage; not California's \$6.75/hr) would total over 5.5 billion dollars
      - enough sandstone for the interior blocks would cost almost 0.6 billion dollars (5.75 million tons at \$100/ton)
      - plus all the skilled labor, limestone, granite, etc. which today would be very expensive
    - the equivalent of well over six billion dollars
      - not to mention all the gold and expensive goods placed in it
    - building this pyramid was possible because Khufu basically owned the entire country, population, and civilization of Egypt, the greatest on earth at the time
  - yet there are over two dozen people in the world today rich enough to do that!
    - Bill Gates, worth \$56 billion in March 2007 (*Forbes*, March 8, 2007), could build eight great pyramids
    - although if he wanted to furnish them all he would have to cut back to just five or six
    - Gates could buy out the greatest pharaoh of Old Kingdom Egypt and still have 80% of his fortune left over!
  - today's society is far *more* stratified than the extraordinarily stratified society of Pharaonic Egypt... amazing!
- **Hierarchy**: a system of ranking
  - hierarchies may rank people (or other things) according to many different criteria
    - wealth
    - class (involves wealth, but also education, descent, etc.)
    - descent (closest to revered ancestor, like among descendents of George Washington or Thomas Jefferson)
    - ethnicity/race
    - education
    - age

- gender
- position in a hierarchical organization, like the church or a business
- hierarchies can vary in other ways
  - by the number of levels they involve
    - US culture acknowledges just a few levels
      - such as lower, middle, upper class
      - although these divisions are little more than customary
    - India: **caste** system with 100s of levels, lumped into a few larger categories
      - Brahmins: priests
      - Kshatriya castes: soldiers, politicians, administrators
      - Vaisya castes: farmers and merchants
      - Sudra castes: service to other castes; include untouchables in polluting professions
      - (the caste system is based on birth: you are born into a caste and stay there)
      - (different castes are not only ranked by prestige, but they have occupations associated with them, rules about what other castes one can marry, etc.)
  - by the privileges associated with different levels
  - by the strength of boundaries between levels
    - also called **permeability** or **mobility**
    - in India, you cannot move between castes; they are fixed by birth
    - in US, one can move between income levels and classes, less between ethnicities, almost not at all between races
      - but in US, class is still strongly by birth: parents' income is the best predictor of children's eventual income
- Foragers live in rough equality
  - observed both ethnographically and historically
  - foragers: reciprocity is needed to even out subsistence risk
    - chance in hunting, especially, requires sharing in a group
  - leads to an egalitarian ethic
  - Eating Christmas in the Kalahari (Lee 1969)
    - you have read so many references to this that I felt I had to give you the original
    - an elaborate set of practices and values
    - that keep anyone from getting a big head
    - that explicitly try to keep everyone on the same level of status, prestige, etc.
- Most other kinds of societies do not live in equality. Why not?
- hierarchy is NOT typical for humans, who have been foragers for 98% of our existence (or more, depending on how you count)
  - Analogy to this semester-long class
    - if the class covered the existence of our own species, from the first archaic *Homo sapiens* to the present, it would start about 500,000 years ago
    - a semester-long class has 30 meetings of 75 minutes each, or 2,250 minutes; that is 222 years/minute
    - that is about one generation every 5 seconds for the whole semester...

- we would study foragers all the way into the last class meeting, totaling 36 hours, or 98% of the course
  - we would not get to the first farmers (10,000 years ago) until the 30 minutes into the last class meeting
- so how did this aberration of hierarchical society come to be?
  - the historical process is a question for archaeologists
- how is social hierarchy constructed?
  - that is, maintained and instilled in each new member born into the society
  - **naturalizing**: making it seem natural, normal, necessary
  - this is an ongoing research interest in anthropology
- but all social organization is constructed... so, how is social equality constructed?
  - one way, in one culture: "insulting the meat"
  - Lee: *Eating Christmas in the Kalahari*
- Is hierarchy inevitable?
- Is it necessary?
- Constructing hierarchy
  - Naturalizing inequality through cultural values and concepts (ideology)
  - Some societies have ideology of equality (!Kung)
  - other societies have ideologies of inequality
    - idea that differences in status, prestige, wealth, power, etc. are normal, right, natural, necessary
  - such as our ideology of class (Marx)
    - US ideology of class is based on idea that there is equal opportunity and a "level playing field"
      - so any differences in success are due to people's own effort and ability
      - we think some are born more equipped to succeed than others, some work harder, etc.
  - in order for this ideology to be believable, there must be some ability or quality that justifies why some people are upper class
    - intelligence, attitudes towards work or risk, etc.
    - in other societies, it could be that certain families are favored by God, even have the "divine right of Kings"
  - this ideology of class serves psychological needs
    - without it, we would have to think that poverty is unfair
    - we might feel guilty
  - it also serves social stability
    - otherwise, we might try to change something
    - at the upper class's expense
- but there are many other bases for inequality aside from just class
- 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 is not based in actual biological variation

- 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
- White Privilege (McIntosh 1988)
  - she is looking at part of how our hierarchy of social race is constructed
  - FIRST: she uses race as a given category, unexamined
    - this is socially constructed race (white, black, etc.)
    - does not matter if it is "real" biologically; it has real social effects
  - males grant that females are underprivileged, but not that males are overprivileged
    - denying male overprivilege prevents men from seeing the unfairness and changing it
    - McIntosh argues that racism is similar
  - white privilege: unearned assets
    - benefit whites every day
    - but hidden
    - doors open more easily every day by no virtue of one's own
    - [my experience as 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
      - real culture: whites have unearned advantages, so opportunities are not equal, and the playing field is not level
  - contradictions like this cause **cognitive dissonance**
    - discomfort, irritation due to encountering that some of one's beliefs are not compatible with each other
      - some one or more things that seem to be true, must not be
    - one common response is to turn away from the problem and ignore or deny it
    - avoiding cognitive dissonance may be one reason why people tend to deny that racism exists in the US
      - or that genderism, as in male overprivilege, exists
- white is normal, default, unstated... the unmarked category
  - **marked** and **unmarked** categories
    - the unmarked category is the default, assumed category unless the speaker specifies otherwise
    - adult pig is unmarked; piglet is marked
      - "pig" includes adults and juveniles, but we assume adult unless otherwise specified
    - if someone says "president", you probably think of a man
      - it is necessary to say "female president" to bring that image to mind
      - in the field of presidents, male is the unmarked category, and female is marked
    - why does this matter?

- because the unmarked category is the one that is assumed, that seems most typical, normal, appropriate
- all other categories must be specified as deviations from this norm
- think of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis
  - is this language *influencing* how we think?
  - or language *revealing* how we think?
- so, how can I claim that white is the unmarked (normal, default) social race and all others are deviations from the norm?
- just listen to the terms:
  - people of color
    - as opposed to colorless people?
    - as opposed to everyone else, that is, the default category: white
  - ethnic food
    - as opposed to white Americans' food, which comes from an ethnicity that does not have to be specified
    - 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
- of course this is because whites have been the majority in most of the US for a while
  - so naturally the most common type becomes the unmarked, typical category
  - but that does not make it any less true
  - and people are prone to extend this notion of the typicalness and normality of whiteness into other realms where it is less appropriate
- whites consider their lives to be the norm, and the ideal
  - so helping others means helping them be like whites
- since whites are neutral/normal/default category (to ourselves)
  - we feel no racial identity
  - racism does not seem relevant to our lives
  - it seems not to affect us
    - but in fact, it does
    - the effects are positive for whites
    - we are used to these benefits, so we don't notice them
- see McIntosh's list of privileges
- I would add to 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
- we tend to think of racism only as the negative half - racist acts by individuals
  - since we don't think we do "racist" things, racism does not affect us
- also, we tend to think of racism as individual acts
  - we don't recognize systemic racism - that non-whites lack the benefits whites get just by being white
- these views of racism help to keep it invisible to us
  - they protect us from feeling guilty

- or having to do anything or giving up some privilege
  - they maintain the racist status quo
    - benefiting of those at the top of the racial hierarchy
- another kind of inequality: based on gender
  - Society and sex roles (Friedl 1978)
  - 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
    - Just two of many possible anthropological approaches
  - No true matriarchies, ever
  - Some societies where women were frequently chiefs (African Lovedu) or controlled food production and distribution (Iroquois)
    - But men still held other important roles
    - Women 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
      - the distributor of scarce, valued goods in public gains obligations, alliances, prestige
- Among foragers
  - Men often control distribution of hunted meat
    - Gain reputations
    - Well placed to then control trade in other goods
  - While plants gathered by women are distributed only within the family
- Why is labor divided in this way by gender?
  - Childbearing and child care
- Support for the claim: survey of societies in which men control distribution of scarce resources in public to different degrees
  - Washo: males and females collect food together
    - Relatively equal power, freedom of action
  - Hadza: men and women collect food separately but share little
    - Both gather; large animal kills rare, shared
    - Still relatively equal power, freedom of action
  - Tiwi (off 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: males hunt almost all food and other materials, women process it
  - Extreme inequality
  - Women treated as objects: used, abused, traded by men

- Applied to our society:
  - As long as women spend their income domestically, they will have less power and recognition
  - Jobs that give women authority over resources advance their status