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
Marx suggested that the capitalist class consciously, intentionally tries to convince people
that classes are natural and necessary
maybe because they believe it themselves
but in any case, it benefits them, and they have the means to do it
but what about inequality other than class, such as inequality by gender or ethnicity?
Inequality and hierarchies must be constructed in people’s minds
we have to learn what the categories are
man, woman, gay man, and etc.
white, black, Asian, Latino, etc.
these categories are simply ways that we divide up the range of people that we meet
the groupings and lines between them don’t clearly exist in the real world
instead, they are the way we learn to categorize people
members of other cultures might learn to categorize people differently
like the Ju/'hoansi, who categorized African-Americans together with white Americans
and felt no similarity to African-Americans at all
learning how to assign people to these set categories is part of “constructing” the categories in our minds
as we become good at categorizing people…
we come to think that the categories are real
constructing the categories also involves learning what qualities are associated with each
category, and how they rank relative to each other
men are strong, aggressive, control their emotions, etc.
men are more likely to be in positions of power than are women at work, in politics, etc.
men grill the steak; women do the shopping, complicated cooking, and cleanup
all other things being equal, men are in the privileged, dominant, higher-ranked position relative to women, gay men, and others
this is a cultural and social process
in that we learn the categories, their features, and their relative ranking from the people around us (social learning)
and we end up sharing these ideas with the other members of our culture (culture as shared ideas)
Inequality and hierarchy have not only to be constructed, but also naturalized
naturalizing inequality and hierarchy is the process that leads us to think that inequality and hierarchy are natural, normal, necessary, acceptable, and right
it may involve learning theories or arguments that explain or justify the inequality
– such as “men are physically stronger and are more aggressive leaders, so naturally they
tend to hold the dominant positions”
– or “African-American families tend to be dysfunctional, so naturally their kids tend to fail
in school and later life”
– I am NOT saying these are correct, only that such beliefs tend to naturalize hierarchies
– it may also involve learning ways of speaking and think that…
– lead us to unconsciously assume that that hierarchies are natural
– lead us to not see that the hierarchies exist at all

– For example, in European and US 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
– “Scientific” racism is basically dead
– there was a long history of research in the US and Europe that tried to show that people of
European descent had larger brains, were less similar to non-human primates, etc.
– some famous examples have proved to be based on biased or even falsified data
– this kind of “scientific” approach to constructing and naturalizing racism is now
thoroughly rejected
– but “folk” racism is alive and well
– Even if you think overt racism is fading (which is not at all clear), racism is still important in
US society
– earlier this year (March 20, 2010), African-American US 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
– this was just a particularly public example
– how is the idea that African-Americans are inferior constructed in people’s minds? How is it
naturalized so that some people believe it, or tolerate it?
– 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 men grant that women are underprivileged, but not that men 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 we tend not to think about it that way
- our culture constructs the gender hierarchy primarily in terms of disadvantages to women, not advantages to men
  - this leads (or conveniently allows) both men and women to not even see the hierarchy, or gender ranking
  - we think in terms of solving cases of unfairness to women
  - not of questioning the whole concept of gender hierarchy and the dominance of men

- without considering advantages to men, 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 remains hidden because acknowledging it would contradict other cultural ideals
  - 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…
– common responses to cognitive dissonance
  – ignore or deny the problem
    – “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?”
  – get irritated when someone points it out
  – avoid it by not thinking about the issue
  – the tendency to avoid the discomfort of cognitive dissonance is probably 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 adding further detail, “marking” the term as a baby:
        – pig + let = “piglet”
        – pig + baby = “baby pig”
    – "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
    – not all categories have marked vs. unmarked options
      – English often forces us to specify sex when we are talking about a person
        – “him” or “her”, “his” or “hers”
      – Neither is marked or unmarked, because there is no term that includes both unless otherwise specified
    – Again, I suggest that “white” is the normal, default, unstated category of Americans… the unmarked category
      – 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 usually 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
– 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
– Marked and unmarked categories are a matter of language, or grammar, or how words are defined
  – As we speak (about “people” vs. “ethnic people”, etc.), we constantly imply that
    – whiteness is the norm
    – other identities are different from the norm
    – is this language influencing how we think?
  – or language revealing how we think?
– 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 or ethnic 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
- one more way that racism is hidden
  - we tend to think of racism in terms of individual, negative acts
  - racist acts by individuals
  - since most whites don't think they do "racist" things, they can feel that they are not
    involved in racism
  - but whites do gain from white privilege
  - this is an example of systemic racism
    - racial inequality built into social systems, rather than individual acts
    - “racial disparities” based on
      - Where people live
      - Educational options available to them
      - Norms of appropriate speech and dress, etc.
    - Thinking of racism as individual acts helps keep it invisible to whites
  - So, how is hierarchy by social race constructed?
    - using “white” as the unmarked category causes people to constantly re-state the racist
      assumption that whiteness is the norm in our society
    - while also hiding the very existence of race in the lives of white people, since whiteness
      rarely has to be stated
    - thinking of racism as individual, negative acts also hides racial inequality
    - people’s tendency to avoid cognitive dissonance leads them to think in ways that hide,
      ignore, or deny that racism (systemic racism, white privilege) exists
    - but even so, the people at the top of this hierarchy (whites) benefit from it
      - since the unfairness is hidden, they don’t act to change it
- Another kind of inequality: based on gender
  - In Society and sex roles (Friedl 1978). Friedl asks
    - 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
– These are 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
  – In some societies, women and men shared power
    – where women were frequently chiefs (African Lovedu) or controlled food production and distribution (Iroquois)
    – But men still had access to power or held other powerful roles
    – Women were relatively equal, but not dominant in these cases
  – But in most societies, men have more of the power
  – Why?
– 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
      – especially in large group rabbit hunts where everyone’s contribution was needed
      – 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?