

Lecture 2

Definitions of Ethnicity and Race

Mapping the Terrain

- We first need to have clear definitions of ethnicity and race.
- These terms are not interchangeable

Ethnicity Defined

- Ethnic: Word derived from the Greek word *ethnos*, meaning nation.
- It refers not to political unity, but the unity of *persons of common blood or decent*
- In early English, the word “ethnic” referred to someone who was neither Christian or Jewish.
- Those whom are not “us”

Sociological Definitions

- Max Weber, *Economy and Society*

“We shall call “ethnic groups” those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities or physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration.”

“It does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists”

Overview of Weber's Definition

- Real or assumed common decent
- What matters is not whether a blood relationship actually exists, but whether it is *believed* to exist
- Multiple bases for common decent possible; physical traits, culture, religion, language
- Ethnicity exists with a belief in common decent

Modern Definitions

- Weber's notion of common descent is central to a number of definitions.
- Many definitions, however, have abandoned his ideas, and conceptualized ethnicity as shared **culture**.
- **Lets take a detour to define culture, and how this concept compares to identity, or cognitive processes.**

Culture

- The shared values, beliefs, knowledge and rules of a population of individuals.
- Example: Ethnic groups in U.S. with different beliefs about how many children people should have, or the types of foods people should eat or should not eat.

Culture (Rules)

- Rules are cultural prescriptions of behavior that should be followed. Rules are evidenced by the SANCTIONS (rewards and punishments) they produce when behavior is violated or exceptionally upheld.

Examples of Societal Rules (Norms)

- ATM lines
- Eye contact/distance of communication
- Surfing rules
- Bathroom rules?



Social Cognition

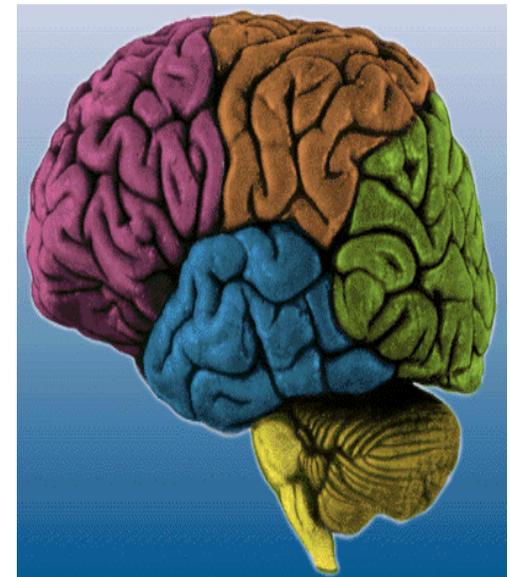
- **The cognitive approach focuses on how people structure and process information**

What do we **notice**?

How do we **interpret** information?

How do we **judge** social situations?

What do we **retrieve** from memory?



Cognitive Processing

- **Categories:** we perceive the world in bundles or categories of information. (a shelf of books rather than each book; an ethnic group rather than a number of distinct individuals.
- Thus, the objective world often less important than the interpretive or subjective world.

Cognitive Processing and **Self-concepts**

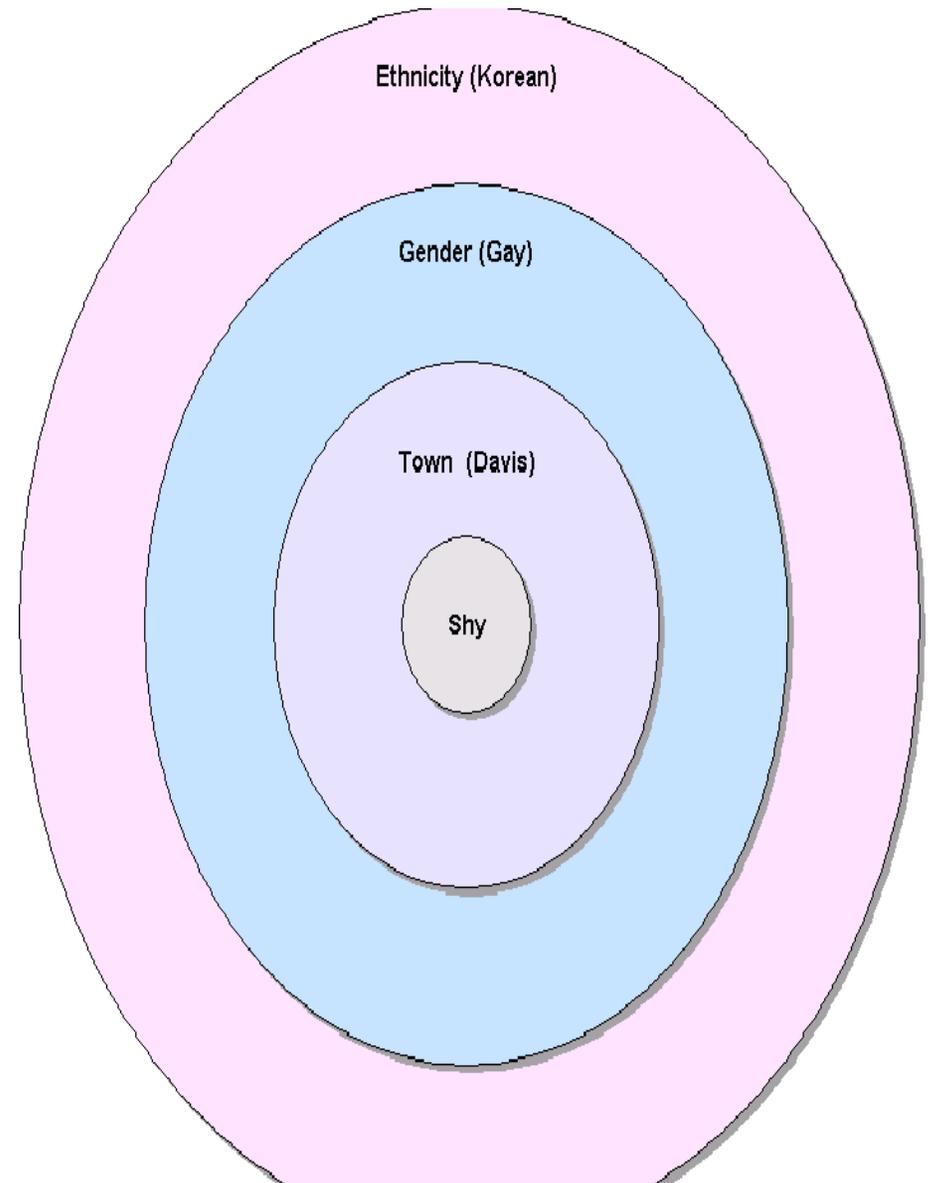
Self-concepts: Mental representations of self-knowledge.

- Theories (“I am good because I am religious”)
- Expectations (“I will be rich”)
- I am an American
- I am Irish

Social Identity and Self-concepts

- Self-concept contains information about your social identity.

Socialization and Experiences at various stages in an individual's life bring them various social identities (towns, ethnicity, nations, etc.)



And now, back to definitions of
ethnicity....

Cultural Definitions of Ethnicity

- “a group of people generally recognized by by themselves and by others as a distinct group with such recognition based on social or cultural characteristics”
- “a group socially distinguished or set apart by others or by itself, primarily on the basis of cultural or national-origin characteristics”

Ambiguity of Cultural Definition

- Can we define ethnicity as some level of “shared or cultural characteristics”, or “historical experiences”?
- What about Deadheads, lawyers, fraternities, colleges alumni?



Definition Preferred by Book Authors

- Ethnicity: “a collectivity within a large society having a real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood”

Elements of the Definition

- **Three claims:** kinship, common ancestry, certain symbols capture the core of the group's identity.
- Can be real or imagined
- Cultural distinctiveness is irrelevant
- Subpopulation of society
- Self-consciously ethnic

Race

- An elusive concept like ethnicity
- Genetically distinct subpopulation of a given species?
- No, many problems with such a simple distinction

Formal Human Classification

Linnaeus, *Systemae Naturae*, 1758

- Europeaeus
 - White; muscular; hair – long, flowing; eyes blue
- Americanus
 - Reddish; erect; hair – black, straight, thick; wide nostrils
- Asiaticus
 - Sallow (yellow); hair black; eyes dark
- Africanus
 - Black; hair – black, frizzled; skin silky; nose flat; lips tumid

Race and Social Stratification

Linneaus (1758) *Systemae Naturae*

- Europeaeus (white)
 - Acute, inventive, gentle, governed by laws
- Americanus (red)
 - Obstinate, merry, free, regulated by custom
- Asiaticus (yellow)
 - Haughty, avaricious, severe, ruled by opinions
- Africanus (black)
 - Crafty, indolent, negligent, governed by caprice or the will of their masters

Folk Notions of Race

- Distinguishable, nonoverlapping, categories
- Distinct essences
- Fixed & stable (immutable)
- Natural

19th-20th Century Anthropology

- Folk and “scientific” notions of race begin to diverge in the early 20th century
- Anthropologists and other scientists observed:
 - clinal variation of measurable traits
 - single African origin
- **“The more traits you looked at, the more races you could see.”**

J Marks, Human Biodiversity, 1995

- Physical measurements do not identify distinct categories of humans to correspond with folk notions of race

1970-2000: Geneticists Rediscover What Anthropologists Knew

- No dramatic genetic discontinuities among humans
 - Little genetic variation when compared to other organisms → young species with a single common origin in Africa
- Clinal variation
- Far more within-group than between-group variation

Clines

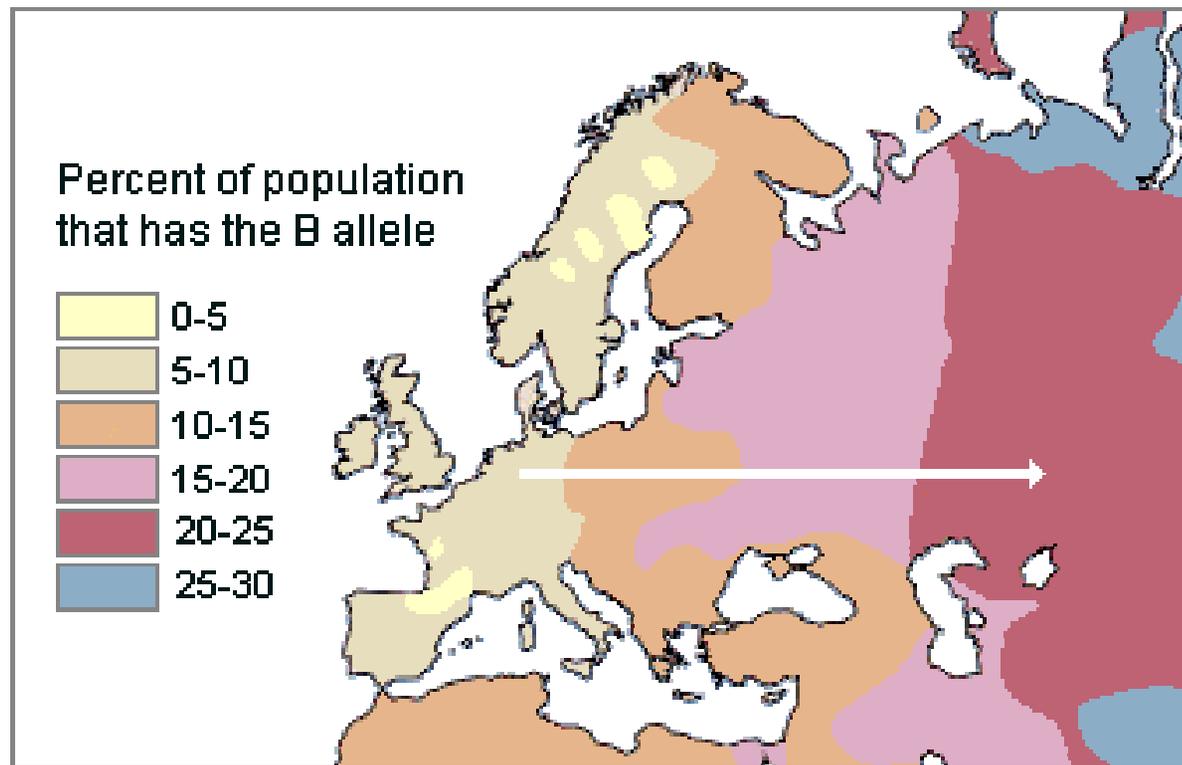
- Cline: a biological term for variation in people.
 - **Cline**-regular variation in a trait over geographic space and is maintained by natural selection.
- Skin color is not so much a racial trait as a clinal trait, varies according to amount of solar radiation.
 - Solar radiation-dark skin to avoid too much radiation (equatorial populations), light skin to get as much solar radiation as possible (northern populations).
 - This has no relationship to how smart people are, or how fast or slow or anything.

Sickle cell anemia

- It is the result of a mutation in Central Africa.
- Heterozygotes have some protection against malaria.
- This produces a selective advantage for this balanced polymorphism.
- This happened only a couple of thousand years ago.

Clinal Distribution of Blood Type

Type



Clinal distribution of the B blood allele in Europe

Human Genetic Variation

- Humans are $> 99\%$ genetically alike
- Of the $< 1\%$ variation
 - $\sim 85\%$ is within any human population or group (such as town/village/tribal or ethnic group)
 - $\sim 10\%$ is between any two groups, even those that are geographically close
 - $\sim 5\%$ is between geographically distant groups such as two towns/villages from different continents

Implications of High Within-Group Variation

- No unifying genetic essence for people of the same race
- People of the same race are not necessarily “closely related” when compared to people of different races
 - the families metaphor of race is misleading,
 - the “breed” metaphor is inapposite
- People of Africa are the most genetically diverse → although African Americans are the most “raced” people socially, black is the least coherent of genetic categories

Contemporary Scientific Controversy

- Abandon race as a variable in biomedical research:
 - “race has no biological basis” (Shwartz, NEJM, 2001)
 - “race has no scientific basis” (Witzig, Annals of Int. Med., 1996)
 - use of race is “black box epidemiology” that “seldom results in fundamental new understandings of disease.” (Bhopal, BMJ, 1997)
 - Use of race “lacks scientific validity” (Haga & Venter, Science, 2003)

Race as a **social construction**

- Biologically speaking, because of the blending of people from different parts of the world, **there is no such thing as a “pure” race.**
- ***Race = human groups defined by itself or others as distinct by virtue of perceived common physical characteristics that are held to be inherent.***
- ***Thus, a race is a group of human beings socially defined on the basis of physical traits.***

Race as a **social & psychological construction**

- More recently, people have selected/ influenced which race they belong to by which one he/she identifies with the most.
- In U. S. examples of racial categories:
- **Native Americans**
- **Latin or Hispanic Americans**
- **African-Americans**
- **Asian-Americans**
- **Middle-Eastern Americans**
- **Anglo-Americans**