Becoming Cultural Beings
Shaping our identities

SCI 2 FALL 14
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“the most scientific of the humanities, the most humanist of sciences”—Eric Wolf

Humanistic
- History
- Area and ethnic studies
- Communications Studies
- Anthropology

Scientific
- Psychology
- Sociology
- Political Science
- Environmental Studies
- Anthropology
Humanistic tools build understanding
- Ethnographic immersion
- Archival research
- Film and literary studies

Scientific tools build knowledge of causes
- Structured observation
- Survey and statistical analysis
- Experimentation

Building Social Science Knowledge
Review of Babies

- In the style of Margaret Mead (1901-1978)
- Observe
- Compare
- Reflect
What activities in the video invoked a bit of culture shock? What cultural assumptions about how we treat babies startled you?

How did men’s and women’s roles differ? What acts of motherhood and fatherhood surprised you? How did people of different ages interact with the babies?

How did the material surroundings of each household change each baby’s experience? Consider housing, animals and technology.
Thinking about Behaviors and Identities

Single factor

Many factors
What are the differences we make matter?

- Gender
- Race
- Culture/Ethnicity
- Nationality

- What is birth ascribed?
- What is enacted and created?
A race is a human population that is believed to be distinct in some way from other humans based on real or imagined physical or genetic differences:

- skin color
- facial characteristics
- Hair texture
Skin colour map for indigenous people
Predicted from multiple environmental factors


Evolved Skin Color
- Vitamin D needs sunlight on skin
- Rickets is a consequence of poorly metabolized Vitamin D
- Rickets leads to pelvic deformity, reduced fertility and survival

Why does it matter?
Why do we choose to make the differences matter?

- We socially construct our identities
- We use those constructions to classify people
- Power influences how we apply those constructs and justify difference treatment

Consider race, gender, ethnicity as schema
We create schema to:

- Organize our thoughts or behaviors.
- Cluster pre-conceived ideas.
- Represent some aspect of the world.
- Construct knowledge about ourselves and the self.
- Organize social information.
- Organize our knowledge and assumptions about something and interpret that information.
Social Construction of ancestral identities

- Why ancestral identities?
  - Ascribed at birth
  - Linked to place and later nationality
  - Convenient to identify groups of people
  - Built into everyday actions through names, categorization,
What other kinds of identities exist?

- Consider other cultural identities...
  - How do they get created?
  - How do they change?
  - Who gets to decide who is in and out?
Why anthropologists avoid “nature/nurture” dichotomies

  - Is language natural or nurtured?
  - Is adulthood natural or culturally defined?