Becoming Cultural Beings
Shaping our identities
“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
Building Social Science Knowledge

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
Review of Babies

- In the style of Margaret Mead (1901-1978)
- Observe
- Compare
- Reflect
Babies Observations, Comparisons and Reflections

- 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
What are the differences we make matter?

- Gender
- Race
- Culture/Ethnicity
- Nationality

- What is birth ascribed?
- What is enacted and created?
RACE

• 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
Evolved Skin Color

Skin colour map for indigenous people
Predicted from multiple environmental factors

Why does it matter?

- 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 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?