



“Race” and Ethnicity

8

Lecture Outline

After having read chapter 8, you will be able to

- explain the process of racialization.
- summarize the 4 elements of racism.
- differentiate between the three main types of racism using examples.
- explain the difference between race and ethnicity.
- briefly summarize the five theoretical approaches to ethnicity.
- critically discuss the historical racialization of Indigenous people and visible minorities in Canada.

Chapter Summary

“Race” is a term that reflects beliefs about biological superiority and inferiority and was first applied to humans in the context of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European colonial expansion. As biological entities, race does not exist among humans: it is unclear how many racial categories there are, how to define racial categories and how to explain differences within racial categories as well as similarities between them. But while “race” in and of itself does not exist, racialization does. **Racialization** is a social process through which individuals are viewed and judged as essentially different in terms of their intellect, morality, values, and innate worth due to perceived differences in physical appearance or cultural heritage.

The racialization of Indigenous people began during the sixteenth century in the context of European colonization. Although Indigenous people have been living in what is now Canada for at least 14,000 years, their history is largely ignored in Canadian textbooks, which tend to focus on the history of settlers and their descendants. Indigenous people’s voices have rarely been heard in sociological discussion, and they have been studied primarily in terms of social problems, largely ignoring success. Thus, Canada’s Inuit, First Nations, and Métis continue to be viewed as “the other” today. Indigenous people today continue to be defined by a complex system of legal statuses that emerged from the 1876 Indian Act. These designations include **registered Indian**, Bill C-31 Indian, band member, reserve resident, treaty Indian, **Métis**, and Eskimo (or **Inuit**).

Black Canadians also have a history of racialization. Black communities have long existed in Canada, specifically since the British Proclamation of 1779, with a significant population increase in Nova Scotia following the American Revolution. Despite their long history in the country, black Canadians are still treated as newcomers to the country, assumed to be recent arrivals from Africa and the Caribbean. Like Indigenous people, black Canadians are viewed as “the other.” Research suggests that black Canadians still face significant racism in education and the criminal justice system, for example. Yet, the focus of academic research and public discourses is often on problems in black communities, rather than accomplishments or the effects of systemic racism.

Racism is a product of four linked elements: racialization (the construction of certain groups as biologically superior or inferior), **prejudice** (the pre-judgment of others on the basis of their group membership), **discrimination** (the act of treating individuals differently based on their group membership), and power (manifested when institutionalized advantages are regularly handed to some groups over others). Clinical psychologist Beverly Daniel Tatum emphasizes the importance of power, arguing that in a white-dominated society like Canada, “racist” is a label that can only be accurately applied to the racialized bigotry of white people against non-white people. Non-white people can be prejudiced but not racist, as they do not have institutional, structural, ideological, or historical support to institutionalize discrimination.

Racism exists in different forms. **Racial bigotry** is the open and conscious expression of racist views by an individual. **Systemic** (or **institutional**) **racism** occurs when racist practices, rules, and laws become institutionalized. Racism can also be subtle and hidden. Expressed with a smile or with seemingly friendly words, this is called **friendly** (or **polite** or **smiling**) **racism**. A common form of friendly racism is microaggression, which is not necessarily intended as an insult, yet reflects racial prejudice.

Historical racism is often downplayed or omitted in **master narratives**, which are stories that countries construct about themselves, because these stories would make the dominant culture look bad. The master narrative of early Canadian history highlights the co-operation between Indigenous people and European fur traders, but ignores the historical mistreatment, exploitation and social destruction that occurred. Social theorist Michel Foucault called these sorts of strategic omissions “buried knowledge.” Canada’s buried knowledge includes systemic racism targeted at various racialized groups. These groups include the Chinese via the Chinese head tax. In British Columbia, Japanese fishermen had made up the majority of salmon fishers in the province until the government began restricting their fishing licences to prevent this “takeover.” Sikhs were initially welcome in BC. But when jobs in lumber and other industries dwindled, attitudes changed and Sikhs were portrayed as a menace. As the example of the Komagata Maru illustrates, the government took active steps to prevent further immigration, dramatically reducing the size of the community.

Understanding ethnicity is not just a matter of collecting ethnic traits, such as language, food, and clothing, and applying the appropriate label. There are a variety of theoretical approaches to the study of ethnicity and ethnic conflict, including primordialism, postcolonialism, ethnicity as epiphenomenal, instrumentalism, and social constructivism. **Primordialism** (also known as **essentialism**) presents culture as static and unchanging and suggests that every ethnic group is made up of a number of traits that have been carried down from past generations with little or no change. **Anti-colonialism** (also known as **post-colonialism**) analyzes the destructive impact **colonialism** (the economic and political exploitation of a weaker country or people by a stronger one) has on both the colonizer and the colonized. This approach focuses on the role of colonialism on the develop-

ment and escalation of conflict between groups. Relevant here is also the notion of **internal colonialism**, or colonialism of one people by another within a single country. **Dual colonialism** is the theory that, under a colonial regime, some groups may be oppressed by both the colonizers and a local group given privilege by the colonizers.

The **epiphenomenal** approach to ethnicity suggests that ethnic conflict is simply a byproduct of the struggle between economic classes. It takes ethnic identity to be a false consciousness that prevents people with shared class interests from overcoming oppression. **Instrumentalism** focuses on emerging ethnicity, rather than on long-established ethnic characteristics. It suggests that elites can mobilize others who identify with them ethnically. Elite members who mobilize ethnicity in order to gain personal wealth and power are known as **ethnic entrepreneurs**. Instrumentalism is seen to be in direct opposition to primordialism. Finally, **social constructivism** is the view that ethnicity is constructed by individuals for varying social purposes. This theory focuses on the motivations of a broad group of people rather than just the elites.

There have been several important sociological studies of ethnicity in Canada. Everett C. Hughes first studied the ethnic division of labour between the English and French in Québec in the 1930s. He found that the English held positions of power while French occupied lowest rung of employment ladder. Dofny and Rioux (1962) called this division into high- and low-ranked jobs along ethnic lines **ethnic class**, and the phenomenon continued in Quebec through much of the twentieth century. Canadian sociologist John Porter studied ethnicity, social class, and opportunity. He found that Canada's society resembles a **cultural mosaic** where ethnic, cultural, and religious groups maintain their separate identities rather than being forced to assimilate in a **melting pot**. However, he found that the cultural mosaic was hierarchical, with some ethnic, cultural, and religious groups (particularly White-Anglo-Saxon-Protestants) benefiting more from their group identity than others. Porter termed this hierarchy a **vertical mosaic**.

W.E.B. Du Bois and Daniel G. Hill were two important black sociologists who brought insider perspectives to their pioneering sociological study of "race." In the late nineteenth century, Du Bois became the first African-American sociologist. He researched and wrote on the major problems and concerns of Africans—both in the United States and around the world. Du Bois was also an activist and one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Daniel Hill was the first black Canadian sociologist, beginning his career in the 1950s. He authored books on the social conditions of black people in Canada, but he is known mostly for his applied sociological work. He held several important positions, including Ontario Human Rights Commissioner and ombudsman of Ontario.

Intersectionality theory is an important approach in current sociological research, developed within the context of black feminist thought by critical theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw and sociologist Patricia Hill Collins. **Intersectionality theory** refers to the way minority experiences are shaped by their race in combination with other dimensions of inequality. The combination of multiple negatively valued social locations creates what is called an **interlocking matrix of domination** that is more powerful and oppressive than gender, class, or race/ethnicity alone.

Study Questions

1. Why is it problematic to talk about “race” in an essentialist manner?
2. What is racialization? Briefly describe how Indigenous people and black Canadians became racialized.
3. What is a master narrative? Briefly outline one of the Canadian stories identified by the authors as “buried knowledge.”
4. What is ethnicity? Explain using the theoretical approaches outlined by the author. Which approach do you agree with and why?
5. What was the impact of colonialism on both the Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda and how did it lead to genocide?
6. What is the cultural mosaic, as described by John Porter? How does it differ from the melting pot metaphor? What does Potter mean by “vertical mosaic?”
7. Discuss the contributions of W.E.B. Du Bois, Daniel G. Hill, and Kimberlé Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins to the sociological study of “race.”

Exploration and Discussion Exercises

1. Read Harriet Jacob’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. You may choose to read the entire book, or just a few chapters to get a sense of the situation. The book can be viewed online here: http://www.pagebypagebooks.com/Harriet_Jacobs/Incidents_in_the_Life_of_a_Slave_Girl/
What does this story tell you about instances of racism? In what ways is Harriet Jacobs is a victim of all of the four linked elements that determine racism? What type(s) of racism are outlined throughout this reading?
2. How does the role of resistance come into play in the colonization of First Nations peoples? One example of resistance you might explore is the Idle No More movement that began in Canada in November of 2012. Here is a link to help you get started on your research: <http://idlenomore.ca/>

Further Readings

Denis, J.S. (2012). Transforming Meanings and Group Positions: Tactics and Framing in Anishinaabe–White Relations in Northwestern Ontario, Canada. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 35(3): 453–470.

This article illustrates systemic racism against Indigenous people on part of the federal government and the use of master narratives to justify past discrimination

Karakayali, N. (2005). Duality and Diversity in the Lives of Immigrant Children: Rethinking the “Problem of the Second Generation” in Light of Immigrant Autobiographies. *Canadian Review of Sociology* 42(3): 325–343.

This article examines the many, at times conflicting worlds in which children of immigrants to Canada live

Invisible City: https://www.nfb.ca/film/invisible_city/

This documentary follows two young black men growing up in Toronto’s Regent Park. It illustrates a number of course related themes, including racialization, racism, social class, poverty, socialization and deviance

The Invisible Nation: https://www.nfb.ca/film/invisible_nation/

This documentary provides an account of the Algonquin people and their lives prior to European colonization. It further discusses the consequences of colonization for the Algonquin people and their experience of systemic discrimination, racism, human rights violations and poverty

Who Gets In: https://www.nfb.ca/film/who_gets_in/

This film focuses on Canadian immigration policies and how they shape the characteristics of newcomers to this country.

Assembly of First Nations: <http://www.afn.ca/>

Website of the Assembly of First Nations that represents the interests of First Nations across Canada

Project Implicit: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>

This online assessment developed by Project Implicit measures an individual’s implicit biases pertaining to race and skin tone, for example

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada:

<http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=3>

A good hub of resources pertaining to the residential school system, including survivor accounts