This seminar is envisioned as a “thinkshop” for students who are engaged in or plan to undertake original research on race. The seminar will grapple with some of the major questions and controversies that confront social scientists who seek to contribute to this field of scholarship today. Like social scientists in all other subfields, those who do research on race must make a series of choices to produce original scholarship: How to define the object of study? Which methods to use? Whether to use a combination of methods? How to select the unit of analysis? How to measure variables or operationalize key concepts? What does it mean to measure variables? How to identify the set of comparable cases and use comparative reasoning to derive generalizable conclusions? What does it mean to compare? What does it mean to say that conclusions are generalizable? Generalizable to what and for what? Is there an established paradigm in sociology? If so, what are its foundational assumptions? If not, what are the competing approaches? How do we go about our research in a time of debate?

In this seminar, we will consider how such research questions give rise to distinctive challenges and controversies when the focus of research touches on issues of race. The goal of the seminar is not to resolve all such controversies, but to directly engage them in order to identify gaps in our current knowledge, map the field of positions in currently open debates, and understand the implications (whether analytical, practical, or political) of opting for one position over another in our own research. By tackling contentious questions in the field of race scholarship head on, the seminar aims to help students develop the knowledge and reflexivity to successfully navigate the contentious terrain of race scholarship as they become active contributors to the field.

The seminar will be run as a participatory discussion, with weekly reading focused on a specific contentious issue or unresolved question in the field. Please note that the content and format of this seminar assume that students have some prior knowledge of scholarship in this field.

**Requirements:** The basic requirement of the course is critical reading of all assigned texts before each class meeting and active participation in class discussions. Some review articles are more tedious than others, but still useful. Please skim these. Readings are available on e-reserves through the Social Science Reference Library.

In addition to reading, all students are expected to:

**(1) Write weekly memos.** These are short *(no more than one typed page)* written responses to the reading for each week. The point of this exercise is to get you in the habit of writing as a natural accompaniment to critical, reflective reading. It is also meant to ensure that everyone comes to
class prepared for a critical discussion. The memos should not summarize the week’s reading, but critically engage it. Specifically, your memos should succinctly address the following:

1. What do you see as the central issue at stake in this set of readings?
2. What, if any, are the points of agreement on this issue?
3. What are the core disagreements?
4. If you had to take a position on the central issue you have identified, what would that position be, and why?

Memos should be posted to the class website by noon on Tuesdays (to allow sufficient time to read them before the class meets on Wednesdays). After each week’s discussion, you are encouraged to revisit your memo and those of your classmates to reflect on whether your initial position shifted at all in light of the class discussion.

The memos will not be graded, but their timely completion is a firm requirement of the course. Two “grace weeks” are allowed over the course of the semester, chosen at the students’ discretion. For the two weeks you choose not to write a memo, simply send me an email with the subject heading “grace week” before the weekly class meeting. No explanation is required. Missed memos beyond the two grace weeks will result in a lowering of your final course grade.

(2) Initiate discussion: Each student will initiate discussion for one or two week(s) of readings with a brief (10 minute) presentation at the beginning of class. The opening comments should not summarize readings. They should draw out key issues at stake, make note of similarities or differences in the positions of different authors, point to the implications of the controversy at hand, offer critiques of specific arguments or ideas, etc. Together with the instructor, the student will help facilitate the class discussion that follows.

(3) Write a final paper. Students have two options for the final assignment.

Option #1: Write a paper that directly engages one of the questions or controversies covered during the semester. The paper should build from the assigned reading and discussion, but then move beyond what was covered in class to take on a particular issue in more depth or to broaden the focus to related concerns. The paper should be written in the form and style of a stand-alone journal article that seeks to contribute to advancing discussion on a currently unresolved question or controversy in the field.

Option #2: Write a paper that examines the implications of one or more of the issues covered in the class for the student’s own research project or agenda. All students considering this option should consult with the instructor during office hours prior to mid-point of the semester to discuss their ideas for the final paper.
Course Outline

Week 1. (9/7) Introduction

Week 2. (9/14) Racial Categories and Classification

In a field wrought with disagreement over concepts, methods, ideology and politics, the idea that race is a social construct has enjoyed remarkable consensus. But recently, two sociologists have challenged the idea that racial categories are socially, politically, and culturally constructed. Some geneticists also have recently argued that races are more than social constructs. Other sociologists, anthropologists, and geneticists have argued that this re-introduction of races as genetic categories is based on incorrect understanding of the new genomics. This field of debate is well marked and will hopefully give us guidelines for other debates about race in the social sciences. We will examine some of this literature in this week’s readings. We will also discuss what it means to say that race is socially constructed.


(NOT REQUIRED: The article above was written to correct the misinformation in the article by Shiao, Jiannbin Lee, Thomas Bode, Amber Beyer, and Daniel Selvig. 2012. “The Genomic Challenge to the Social Construction of Race.” Sociological Theory 30(2):67-88. Their article makes no sense if you know the science, so I do not recommend reading it, it made my head ache. Our paper was aimed to correct the misinformation in their article, so we had to write a lot about statistical genetics. I will summarize their article and ours in class.)


**Recommended:**
- ASA Statement on Race. ([http://www2.asanet.org/media/asa_race_statement.pdf](http://www2.asanet.org/media/asa_race_statement.pdf)) We will read this in a later session.
- Film: “Race: The Power of an Illusion. Episode I: The Difference Between Us” Available at the Social Work library. This film is commonly used in undergraduate teaching. See also the accompanying exercises online: [http://www.pbs.org/race/000_General/000_00-Home.htm](http://www.pbs.org/race/000_General/000_00-Home.htm)
- Movie: *Skin*. “*Skin* is a British-South African 2008 biographical film – based on the book *When She Was White: The True Story of a Family Divided by Race* by Judith Stone – directed by Anthony Fabian, about Sandra Laing, a South African woman born to white parents, who was classified as "Coloured" during the apartheid era, presumably due to a genetic case of atavism.” “SKIN is one of the most moving stories to emerge from apartheid South Africa: Sandra Laing is a black child born in the 1950s to white Afrikaners, unaware of their black ancestry. Her parents are rural shopkeepers serving the local black community, who lovingly bring her up as their ‘white’ little girl. But at the age of ten, Sandra is driven out of white society. The film follows Sandra’s thirty-year journey from rejection to acceptance, betrayal to reconciliation, as she struggles to define her place in a changing world - and triumphs against all odds.” Quotes taken from websites about the movie.

**Week 3. (9/21) Analytical Concepts: Choosing Tools to Think With**

Race, “race”, racism, racialism, racialization, race relations, racial relations, racialized social system, racial domination, racial identity, raced identity, ethnorace, ethnicity, ethnicization . . . researchers in this field use a wide array of closely related terms in their scholarship. Some researchers give little explicit attention to their choice of terminology, while others invoke particular terms deliberately, to mark a theoretical, analytical or political stance. Some researchers distinguish sharply between race and ethnicity, others treat one as a subset of the
other. Some researchers argue for analytical categories that break with the vocabulary of daily life, others reject such a move as impractical or undesirable. How to navigate this terminological minefield? What are the implications of opting for one set of terms over another in our own research? How do we decide which concepts offer the best tools to think with given the focus of our research?


Andersen, Margaret L. and Patricia Hill Collins. 1995. Race, Class and Gender. Preface (pp.xi-xix).

Wacquant, Loic. “For an Analytic of Racial Domination” *Political Power and Social Theory*, v.11 (221-234).


Recommended


Week 4 (9/28):

**Postcolonial Theory: Theorizing Race, Culture, and Nation**


**Recommended, not required:**


**Week 5. (10/5).**

**Race as Variable (I): Constructivism vs. Quantitative Methods**

Sociologists who make use of large N datasets to investigate racial dynamics routinely signal their recognition that “race is socially constructed” in the presentation of their results. But critics argue that prefatory comments or footnotes-of-allegiance to the constructivist school of thought are insufficient gestures - that more can and should be done to bring practices and interpretation of quantitative research into line with constructivist theories of race. Is it really that difficult to do rigorous constructivist work when using quantitative methods? Do critics identify real problems, or are their comments based on inadequate understanding of current uses of statistics?

I may delete one or two readings in this list.


Race as Variable (II): Beyond “controlling for race”

Researchers are experimenting with innovative ways to construct datasets and build models that operationalize, rather than ignore, key tenets of constructivism. Do these efforts resolve the problems identified by constructivists who criticize the use of statistical methods to research race? Or do they skirt the criticisms, leaving underlying issues unaddressed?


http://www.springerlink.com/content/xq0x46n8m22034uw/fulltext.pdf

Week 7. (10/19).

Race as Lived Experience: Ethnographic Practice and Politics

Ethnographers who research racial dynamics face a host of complicated issues in relation to their data. They also confront challenging questions about the status of their findings in relation to the broader field of scholarship on race. In what ways are the challenges of researching race as “lived experience” similar to or different from the kinds of challenges confronted by researchers who analyze “race” as a variable? How do ethnographers who research race navigate the politics and practice of their craft?


Week 8. (10/26).

Race as Boundary: Theory, Concept or Metaphor?

The study of social and symbolic “boundaries” has been popular in recent years. Do we gain leverage from focusing on boundaries as primary objects of analysis? What is lost from view in boundary-focused analytical frameworks? Is this a productive direction for new research or not? Does it open up new fields of inquiry and raise theoretical relevant and empirically
resolvable research questions? Has the boundary-focused approach already exhausted possibilities for new contributions? Has it created problems for the study of race or not?


**Week 9. (11/2)**

**Race-making, race salience, or race meanings in educational contexts**

Investigating how race becomes meaningful and the role of racial thinking, categorization, and identification in schools is an emerging field of scholarship in sociology of education research. Scholars use a variety of theories to explain these phenomena - from racial formation theory to interactionist and process-based theories; and subsequently focus on different features of educational contexts - from school institutions and practices to teacher-student interactions. Some articulate racial or social identity as the mediator of these contextual and interactional inputs i.e. these things affect the racial identity of students which then affects the academic performance, behavior, and outcomes of students.


Week 10. (11/9).

What is white?

I may add one more article to this list.

James Baldwin, “On Being White . . . And Other Lies.”


Ruth Frankenberg, “The Mirage of an Unmarked Whiteness.”


Week 11 (11/16)

Multiracialism


Week 12. (11/23)

The Practice and Politics of Comparative Race Research
In 1967, Pierre L. van den Berghe published *Race and Racism: A Comparative Perspective*, in which he criticized North American scholarship on race for its parochialism and argued the need for more cross-cultural analyses. In recent years, calls for more comparative research have multiplied, as have the number of studies that attempt to fill this gap. But comparison can be tricky business when the subject matter involves race.


**Week 13. (11/30).**

**Race, State and Violence**


Calhoun, Craig. “State, nation, legitimacy” Chapter 4 in *Nationalism* University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

Wimmer, Andreas. “Racism in Nationalised States: A Framework for Comparative Research”. Ch3 in *Comparative Perspectives on Racism*


**Week 14. (12/07).**
Race Research and Group(ness) Politics


Recommended:


Week 15. (12/14).

Race and Diaspora: Beyond Comparative Analysis/Research on Race in a “Globalized” Era


Johnson, E. Patrick. Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South. Univ of North Carolina Press,
