



By Dr. Tom Lifvendahl

# The Social Construction of Race

# Definitions

- Race (Merriam-Webster)
  - A family, tribe, people, or nation belonging to the same stock
  - A class or kind of people unified by shared interests, habits, or characteristics (the English race)
  - A category of humankind that shares certain distinctive physical traits

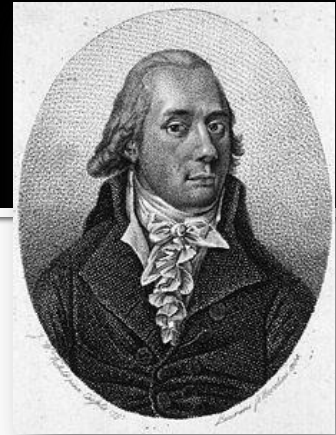
# Definitions cont'd

- Species
  - A category of biological classification ranking immediately below the genus or subgenus, comprising related organisms or populations potentially capable of interbreeding.
  - All humans, capable of reproduction, can interbreed regardless of “race”.

# Social Construct

- A social mechanism, phenomenon, or category created and developed by society
- A perception of an individual, group, or idea that is `constructed' through cultural or social practice
- Race is therefore a constructed belief based on social need (power, control, hierarchy)

# Founder



- Johann Fredrich Blumenbach
  - German (1752-1840)
  - Published his classification system in 1776
- System
  - Mongolian (Mongoloid)
  - Ethiopian (Negroid)
  - Caucasian (Caucasoid)
  - Native Americans (Red)
  - Malay



# Hierarchy

- Whites were “primitive” (first) primary color
  - The name Caucasian was derived from the Caucasus Mountains in Georgia
  - Blumenbach believed that is where the most beautiful whites come from
  - All other “races” derived from the White race
- This classification system became the default norm for typing human beings

# Eugenics

- A science that deals with the improvement of hereditary qualities of a race or breed
- Concept supported
  - Nazi racial superiority
  - Apartheid
  - Phrenology (the study of the bumps on your head)
- Methods employed
  - Skull and bodily measurements
  - Skin color (Pantone like measurements)



# Diversity

- What are the crucial questions that diversity training should cover?
  - What is the level of change demanded of the student as a result of the training?
  - What focus is placed on the trainer to foster change?
  - What activities bridge both aforementioned questions?
  - What evaluation standards are used to insure behavior change?



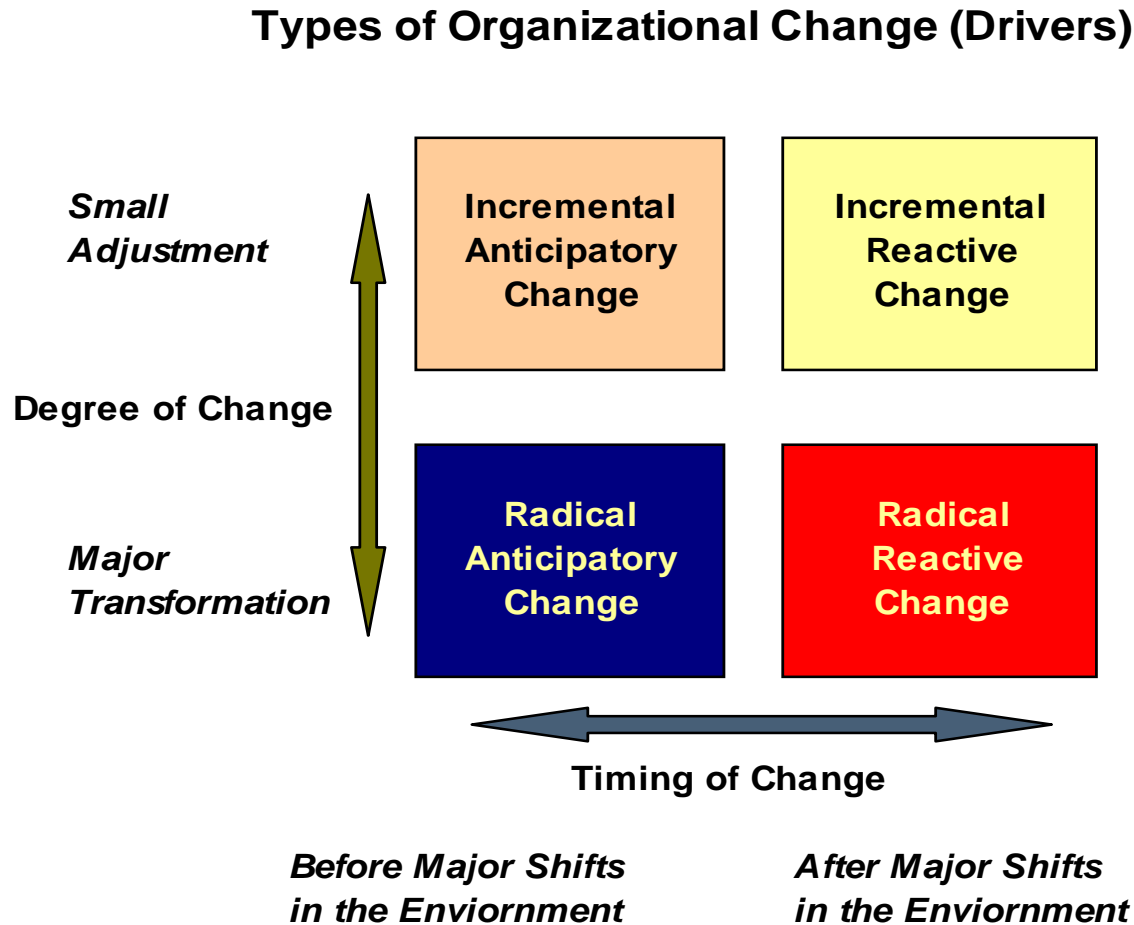
# Problems

- Training tends to:
  - Be overly focused on black vs. whites
  - Not define methods for discerning the complexity of cultural norms and values
  - Under-defines the nature of divergent sexual preferences
  - Addresses legal issues more the social issues

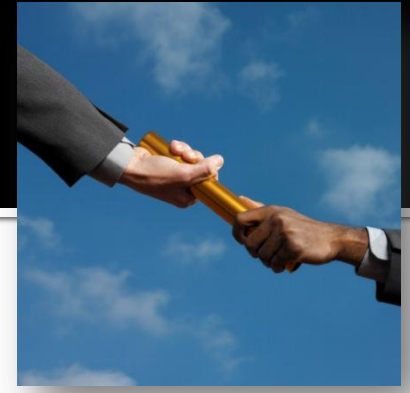
# Problems cont'd

- Needs to:
  - Challenge personal belief structures
  - Question social and class inequities
  - Facilitate learners as they define their own beliefs concerning:
    - Prejudice
    - Discrimination
    - Stereotyping

# Level of Change



# Summary



- Race is a “human construct” open to interpretation
- People discriminate (identify) the “other”
- Becoming aware of how we associate value to others is key to changing behavior
- View each person first as an individual of worth, then as a member of a class etc.