

**ETHNOCENTRISM.CULTURAL
RELATIVISM AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

ETHNOCENTRISM

- Definition
- The tendency to view one's own culture as superior and apply one's own cultural values to judging the behavior and beliefs of people raised in other cultures
- Everybody is a little ethnocentric
- We hear ethnocentric statements all the time

PATRIOTISM VS ETHNOCENTRISM

- Patriotism is love of one's culture.
- Can be patriotic without being ethnocentric

ETHNOCENTRIC IF

- You judge the behavior and beliefs of people who are different from you
- You believe that there are primitive cultures, especially if their life ways are different than your own
- You believe that some cultures are backward if they lack the technology and consumerism of your own culture

NOT TRUE

- No such thing as primitive or backward cultures. All cultures provide their members with the means for meeting all human needs.
- Ethnocentrism has to be taught. You have to be taught that your culture is superior and all other cultures are inferior
- Stop ethnocentric behavior you must stop judging others who are different from you

CHARACTERISTICS OF ETHNOCENTRISM

- Contributes to Social Solidarity, a sense of value and community among people who share a cultural tradition
- People everywhere think that the familiar expectations, and their opinions and customs are right, true, proper, natural and moral
- Regard different behavior as strange, unnatural, immoral and savage

THINK

- Can you think of examples of ethnocentrism you have encountered?
- What is your opinion of Iran and Iranians?
- In Trans-Fly region of Papua New Guinea, homosexuality is valued over heterosexuality
- Men of the Etoro tribe favor homosexuality while their neighbors encourage men to engage in anal sex.

OPPOSING ETHNOCENTRISM

- Cultural Relativism is a viewpoint & position
- That behavior in one culture should not be judged by the standards of another culture, i.e., values and standards of one's own culture
- That the values and standards of culture differ and deserve respect

HUMAN RIGHTS

- Challenge some aspects of Cultural Relativism
- Some cultures in Africa and Middle East practice female genital modification
- *CLITORIDECTOMY* is the removal of the clitoris & *INFIBULATION* involves the sewing of the lips of the vagina.
- Both procedures reduce female sexual pleasure & is a way that men control female sexuality

Why?

- Cultures are male dominate and patrilineal.
- Property, resources and wealth passed from father to sons
- Need to assure father that son is of father's bloodline
- Fear of the likelihood of female adultery

HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCATES

- Oppose such practices
- Such practices infringe on basic human right— control over one's body and one's sexuality
- Some African nations have banned such practices
- What about infant male circumcision?
- Distinguish between moral and methodological relativism

METHODOLOGICAL RELATIVISM

- In anthropology, cultural relativism is not a moral position but a methodological position
- *To understand another culture fully, you must try to see how the people in that culture see things*
- *What motivates them—what are they thinking—when they do those things?*

METHODOLOGICAL RELATIVISM IS A STANCE

- Cultural Relativism as Methodological relativism does not preclude making a moral judgment or taking action
- When faced with Nazi atrocities, a cultural/methodological relativist would have a moral obligation to stop being an anthropologist and take action to intervene

HUMAN RIGHTS AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

- Human rights invokes a realm of justice and morality that is beyond and superior to the laws and customs of particular countries
- Unlike Human Rights *Cultural Rights are vested not in individuals but in groups, such as religious and ethnic minorities and in indigenous societies*
- CR include the right to preserve its culture, to raise its children in their cultural traditions, to continue its language and have economic rights

POSSIBLE CONFLICTS

- Idea of cultural rights is related to the idea of cultural relativism
- What does one do about cultural rights that interfere with human rights?
- Anthropologist main task is to understand another culture
- Anthropologist does not have to approve its practices

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- Most ethnographers (anthropologist who do fieldwork) strive to be objective, accurate and sensitive in their studies of other cultures.
- However, objectivity, sensitivity and a cross-cultural perspective don't mean that anthropologists have to ignore international standards of justice and morality
- What do you think?