

Drawing Racial Boundaries

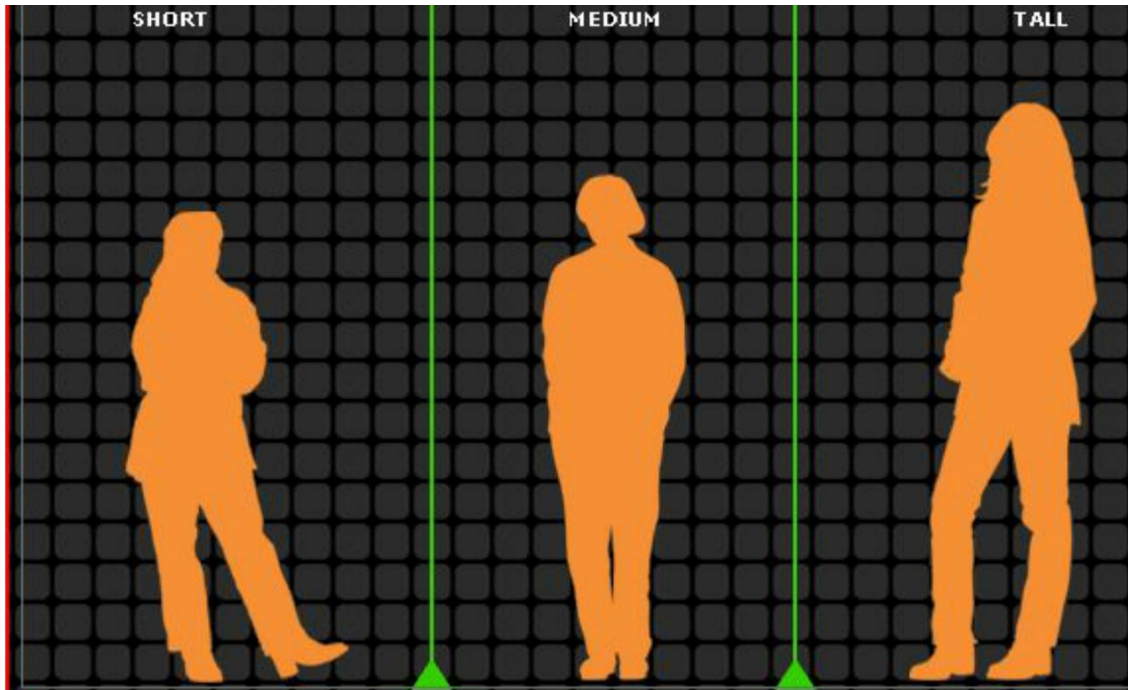
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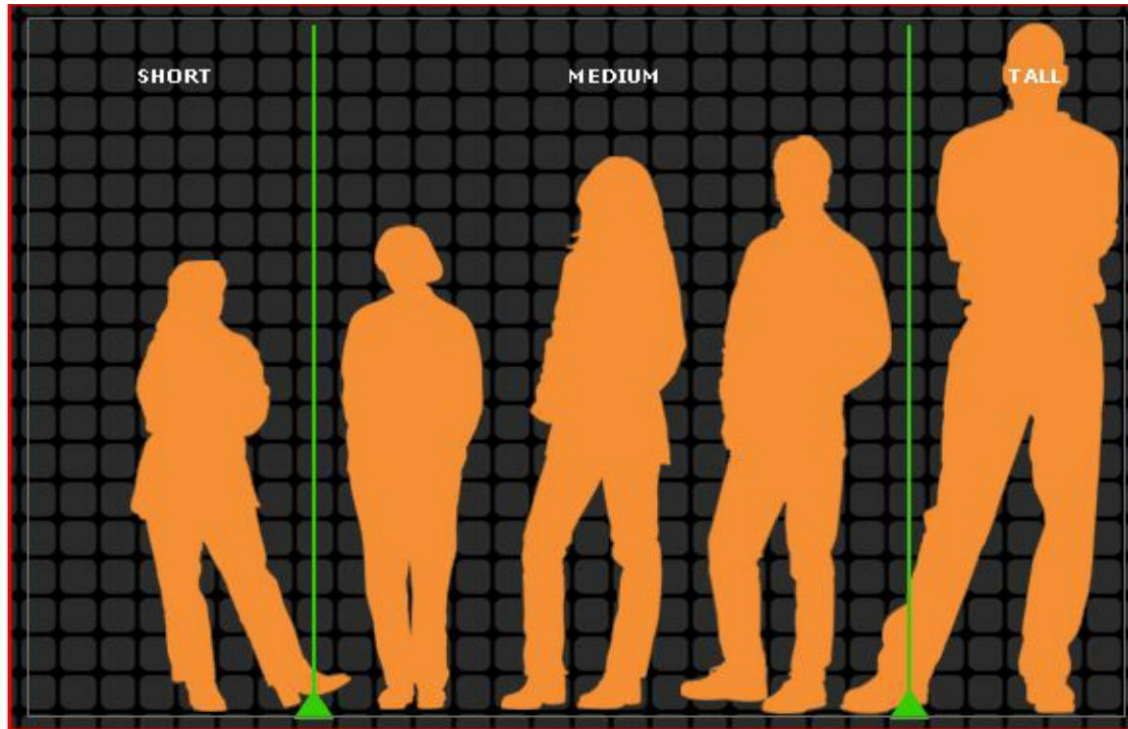
Arbitrary Boundaries

- The following images come from the American Anthropological Association, and attempt to demonstrate how boundaries between racial groups are SOCIAL rather than BIOLOGICAL constructions.
- The images start with a more familiar example – how to designate between people based on height
- Then, the images review demonstrate how racial group boundaries based on skin color are difficult to assign. To borrow from Omi and Wanant, they are problematic and best and arbitrary at worst.



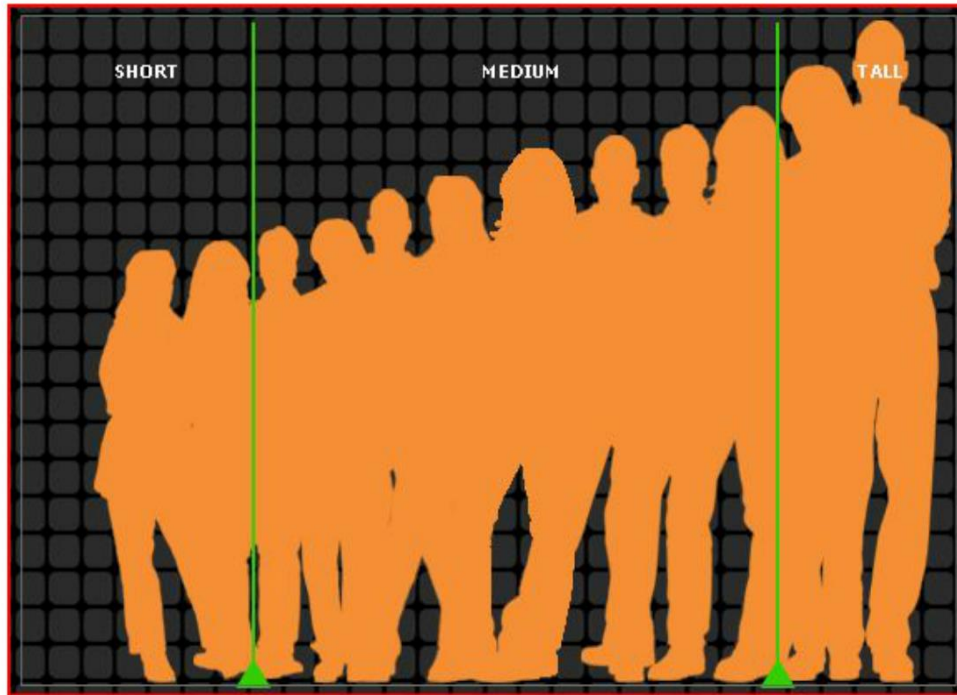
Height

Here is a simple example. We have three people, each with different heights. Based on their relative sizes, we can sort these three people into the tallest, shortest, and in between.



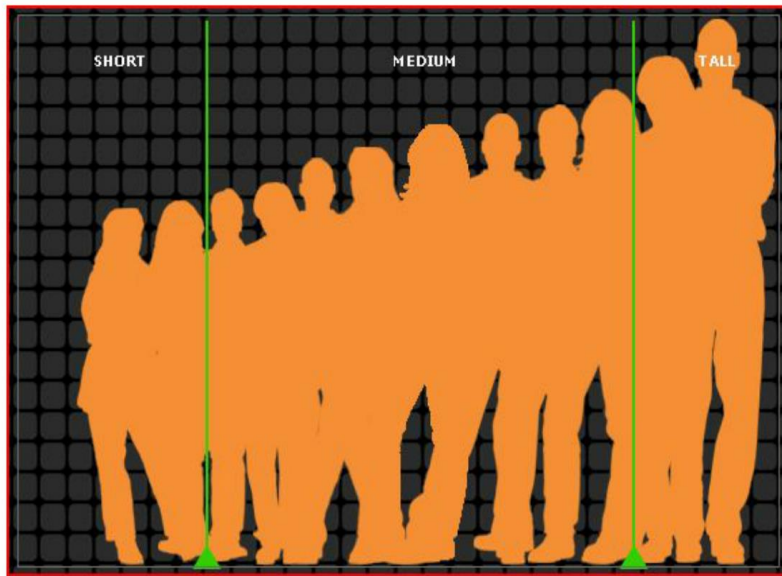
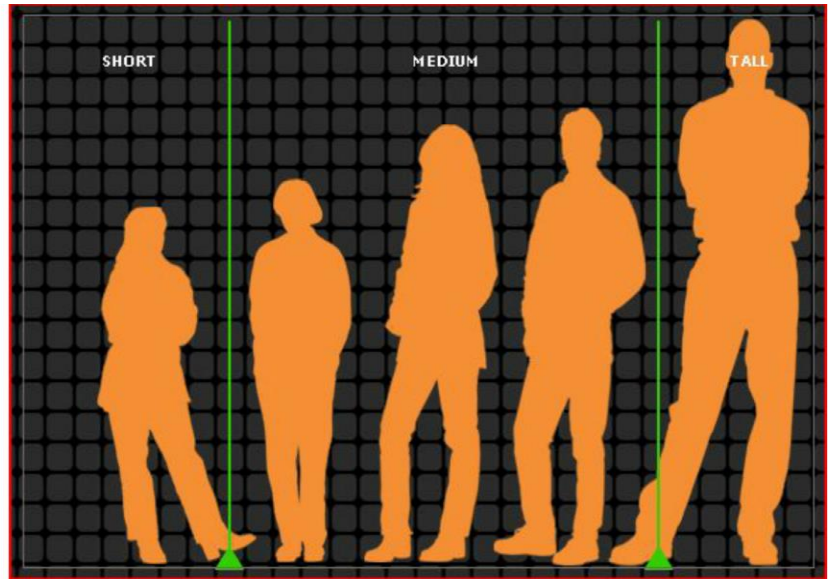
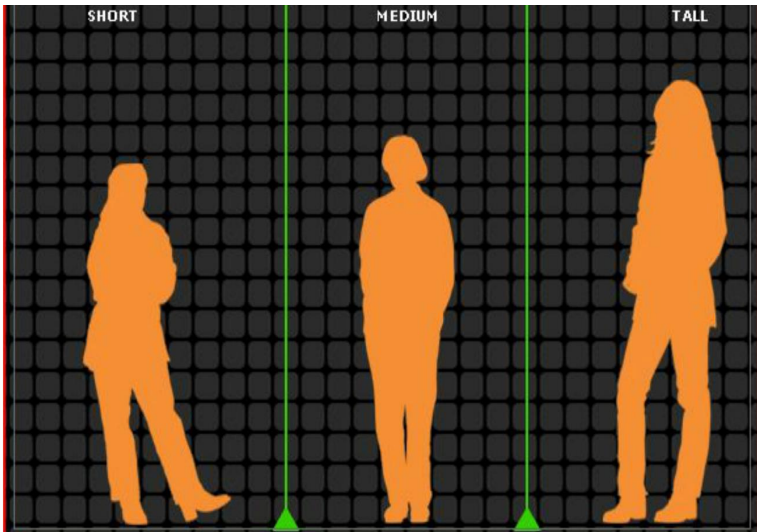
Height (continued)

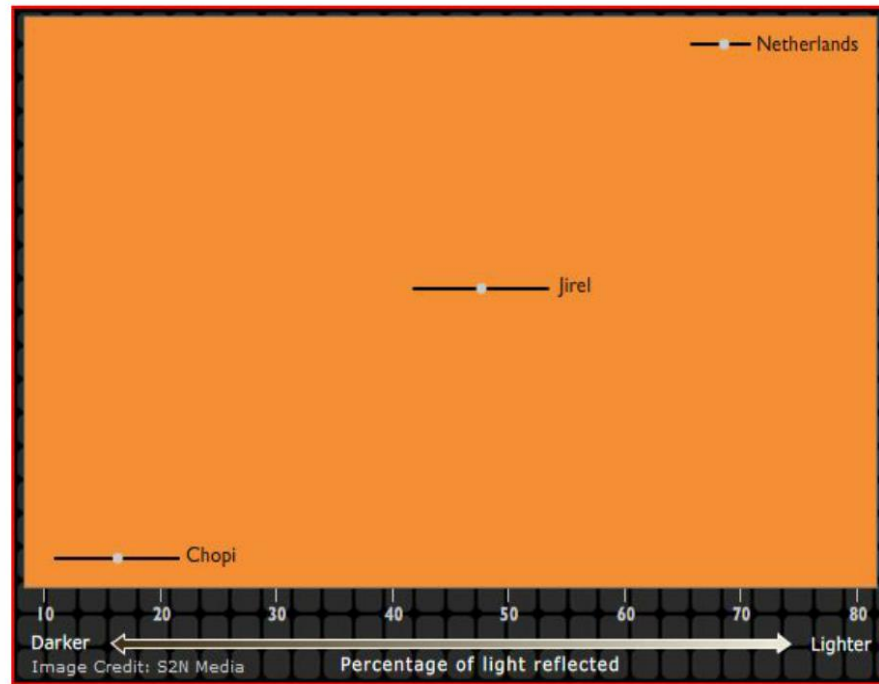
But notice what happens when we add a few more people to our group. Suddenly, relative to the rest of the group, the boundaries change. A person who was 'tall' before is now 'medium'. Not because the boundaries are biological fact, but because they are socially relative.



Height (continued)

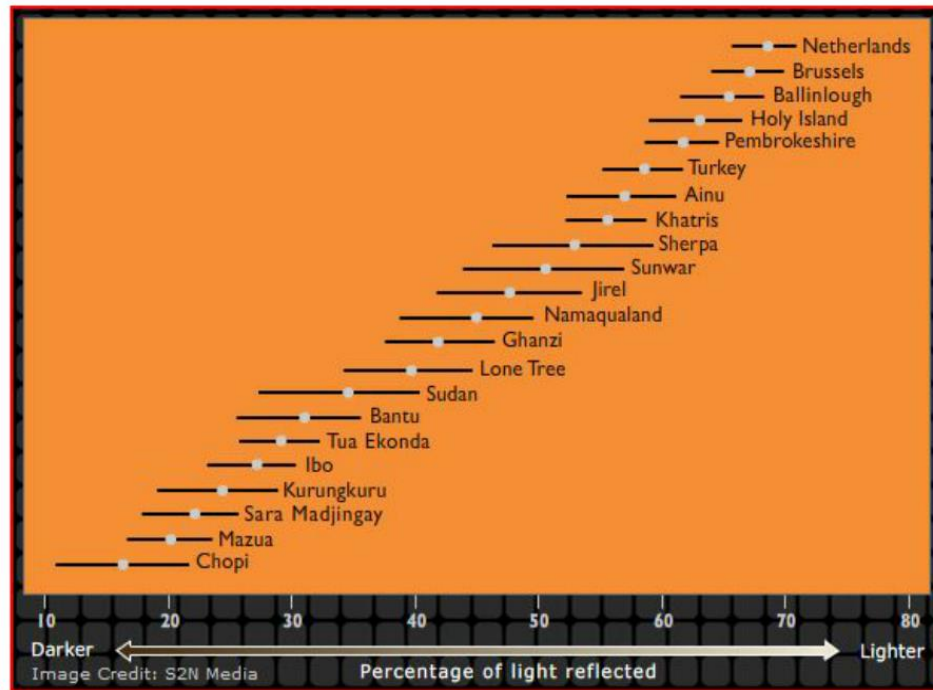
When we add even more people to our group, the boundaries continue to change. Some of the people stay in the same group throughout, but others' groups change based on where we decide to draw the line between 'tall', 'medium', and 'short'.





Race

Now let's look at race. This is a graph that locates different groups of people based on their skin color. The group with the lightest skin color (Netherlands) is to the right, the darkest (Chopi) to the left, with the Jirel somewhere in between. There is a lot of space between each group, so the boundaries between them are very obvious and, probably, enduring. But, these are only **THREE** groups.



Race (continued)

Again, notice what happens when we add more groups of people to the graph. The spaces between each group are no longer very big; they seem to form a relatively continuous line that stretches from darker to lighter. But based on this, where might we divide these groups into racial categories. Should the three lightest groups be considered 'white'? The six lightest groups? Where we draw the line depends on where we, as a society, decide to draw the line and, of course, on who is in power when the line is drawn.

