{chapter 8}

Kinship

CHAPTER OUTLINE

In American society, when you meet someone for the first time, you generally try to find some area of common interest. You may ask where the other person is from, what schools he or she went to, what his or her occupation is, or what hobbies or interests he or she has. Even as kinship is, in fact, an important connection in American society, most people are quite unlikely to ask an acquaintance about his or her grandparents, parents, and siblings. Most of the time Americans understand ourselves and each other as individuals first and family members second. Ideally, Americans deplore **nepotism,** favoritism based on family relationships, especially when it comes to politics. Do you see the examples in our opening statement as an example of nepotism, or just the reality that children of politicians are likely to have a combination of aptitude and exposure that can explain their achievements? Do the close family ties of past and present American politicians "stick in the craw" of Americans as hypocrisy or can we rationalize it as compatible with the values of individuality and self-reliance that are at the core of our culture? As one analyst of political dynasties in the United States points out, "There is none of this squeamishness about kinship in tribal societies, for whom kinship is everything, protection against. . . . all those who are not kin, whether neighbors or strangers" (Murphy 2008). In this chapter we see that in many societies, although kinship may not be everything, it has important functions in all areas of life. <<

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The importance of kinship ties in the United States is illustrated in political families, such as the Kennedys, pictured here.

Kinship: Relationships through Blood and Marriage

Kinship refers to those relationships understood in a society as connected through blood and marriage. Although kinship systems are themselves embedded in economic systems, they have an important independent influence on behavior. In almost all societies, kinship is the basis of group formation, and relationships between individuals are governed mainly by kinship norms. The extension of kinship ties is the main way of allying groups to one another and incorporating strangers into a group. In most of the world's cultures, kinship is central in determining people's rights and responsibilities.

nepotism The granting of privilege or favoritism on the basis of family relationships.

kinship A culturally defined relationship established on the basis of blood ties or through marriage.

kinship system The totality of kin relations, kin groups, and terms for classifying kin in a society.

kinship terminology The words used to identify different categories of kin in a particular culture.

genitor A biological father.

pater The socially designated father of a child, who may or may not be the biological father.

consanguineal relatives Relatives by blood.

affinal Relatives by marriage; in-laws.

In Western societies, other principles of social organization—such as work, citizenship, and common economic and political interests—are also important as bases for group formation and frameworks within which individual rights and obligations are articulated. This does not mean, however, that kinship is insignificant in modern industrialized societies. The nuclear family is a kin group and a core social institution in such societies, and inheritance of property is mainly along kinship lines. Larger groups of relatives also become important on various ritual occasions. For example, in the United States, those who celebrate Thanksgiving generally think of it as a family holiday. A person claiming a kin relation is regarded differently from someone who is not a relative, and there is a strong sentiment that "blood is thicker than water." Although kinship in the United States does not usually determine an individual's choice of occupation, it does play a significant role in some important aspects of American life.

Kinship includes relationships established through blood, described through the idiom of blood, and relationships through marriage. In every society, the formation of groups and the regulation of behavior depend to some extent on socially recognized ties of kinship. Because the different elements of kinship such as behavior, ideology, and terminology are closely related to each other, anthropologists refer to kinship as a system. A **kinship system** includes all relationships based on blood and marriage that link people in a web of rights and obligations, the kinds of groups that may be formed in a society on the basis of kinship, and the system of terms **(kinship terminology)** used to classify different kin.

Kinship systems rest on culturally defined biological relationships; kinship systems are thus cultural phenomena. The ways in which a society classifies kin are cultural; they may or may not reflect a scientifically accurate assessment of biological ties. A classic example demonstrating the cultural element in kinship is that in many societies the term for father as it refers to the child's biological father **(genitor)** is different than the term designating the man who takes on responsibility for the child's upbringing or is socially recognized as the father **(pater).** When fatherhood is established by marriage, the "father" is the mother's husband. In some societies, such as the Toda of India (see page 201 in Chapter 9), biological paternity is irrelevant; fatherhood is established by the performance of a ritual. In this case, social fatherhood is what counts.

Because kinship systems are cultural creations, both **consanguineal relatives** (those related "by blood") and **affinal** relatives (those related by marriage) are classified in dif-

ferent societies in a wide variety of ways. The kinds of social groups formed by kinship and the ways in which kin are expected to behave toward one another also vary widely.

Culturally defined ties of kinship have two basic functions that are necessary for the continuation of society. First, kinship provides continuity between generations. In all societies, children must be cared for and educated so that they can become functioning members of their society. The kinship unit is fundamentally responsible for this task, and kinship structures thus provide the basis for family construction. A society must also provide for the orderly transmission of property and social position between generations. In most human societies, **inheritance** (the transfer of property) and **succession** (the transfer of social position) take place within kin groups according to the specific rules of the kinship system.

Second, kinship defines a universe of others on whom a person can depend for aid. This universe varies widely. In Western societies, the universe of kin on whom one can depend may be smaller than in other societies, where kin groups include a wide range of relations that have significant mutual rights and obligations. The adaptiveness of social groups larger than the nuclear family accounts for the fact that expanded kin groups are found in so many human societies.

Rules of Descent and the Formation of Descent Groups

In anthropological terminology, **descent** is culturally established affiliation with one or both parents. In many societies, descent is an important basis of social group formation. In one sense, of course, the nuclear family is a **descent group,** but here we use descent group to mean a group of consanguineal kin (kin who are related through blood) who are lineal descendants of a common ancestor extending beyond two generations. Where descent groups are found, they have important functions in the organization of domestic life, the enculturation of children, the use and transfer of property and political and ritual offices, the carrying out of religious ritual, the settlement of disputes, and political organization and warfare.

Two basic types of descent rules, or kinship ideology, operate in society. In a cultural system with a rule of **unilineal descent,** descent group membership is based on links through either the paternal or the maternal line, but not both. Two types of unilineal descent rules are **patrilineal descent** and **matrilineal descent.** In societies with patrilineal descent rules, a person belongs to the descent group of his or her father. In societies with matrilineal descent rules, a person belongs to the descent group of the mother. In societies with a system of **bilateral descent,** both maternal and paternal lines are used as the basis for reckoning descent and for establishing the rights and obligations of kinship.

A major distinction between systems of unilineal and bilateral descent is that in unilineal kinship systems kin groups do not overlap. In bilateral kin systems, they do. For example, consider your father's brother's children. In the American bilateral kinship system, they are your cousins, and therefore members of your kin. However, they are equally related to their mother's family, but this family is unlikely to be kin to you. If the system was patrilineal, your father's brother's children would be kin to you, but not to their mother's family. Thus, their kinship would not overlap. If all families had the same number of children, more people would be kin in a bilateral system than in a unilineal system. However, because kinship is overlapping in a bilateral system, people in a unilineal system are bound more tightly to each other than those in a bilateral system.

Unilineal Descent Groups

Most societies throughout the world have unilineal kinship. However, many of the world's people practice bilateral kinship, which is particularly common in Western industrial societies. The frequency of unilineal descent in the world's cultures reflects two major advantages. First, because unilineal descent groups do not overlap, this system provides unambiguous group membership for everyone in the society. Where descent is traced through only one line, group membership is easily and clearly defined. By knowing the descent group to which they belong and the descent group of others, people can be sure of their rights of ownership, social duties, and social roles. They can also easily relate to a large number of known and unknown people in the society.

inheritance The transfer of property between generations.

succession The transfer of office or social position between generations.

descent The culturally established affiliation between a child and one or both parents.

descent group A group of kin who are descendants of a common ancestor, extending beyond two generations.

unilineal descent Descent group membership based on links through either the maternal or the paternal line, but not both.

patrilineal descent A rule that affiliates a person to kin of both sexes through males only.

matrilineal descent A rule that affiliates a person to kin of both sexes through females only.

bilateral descent System of descent under which individuals are equally affiliated with their mothers' and their fathers' descent group.

Anthropology Makes a Difference

Kinship Rules and Realities in a Korean Village

The rules of kinship in Asian villages emphasize patrilineality; primogeniture (the eldest son inherits all of his father's property); seniority; Confucian ethics, which stresses filial piety (the obligation of sons to their fathers); and patriarchal authority and control. However, one of the ways in which anthropology makes a difference is that it opens our eyes to the realities of kinship dynamics as they depart from the rules and adapt to changing circumstances.

In Korea, as elsewhere, people manipulate kinship rules for their own advantage. Inheritance and succession to family headship are contested as family members try to ensure that their contributions are acknowledged and rewarded. Times when family property is divided are particularly important occasions for the reckoning of the balance of credits and debts among family members.

According to the local rules of inheritance in Pine Tree, a Korean village studied by anthropologist Soo Ho Choi, the eldest son gets the lion's share of his family's property, including his parents' house and more than half their land. In return, he must care for his elderly parents and worship them as ancestors after their deaths.

However, the realities of contemporary life often lead to conflict and departure from the rules. Most Pine Tree families are so poor that there is not enough property to divide so that any one child will significantly benefit; in addition, family property has often been acquired through the financial contributions of several family members. When the family property is divided, these people will claim a larger share of the property than the rule of primogeniture would normally allot them. Furthermore, an elder son who does not carry out the important Korean value of "compassionate generosity," by contributing to the marriages, education, and living expenses of his younger siblings, faces strong community disapproval.

The poverty of many Korean villages and the pull of urban industrialization make a city education a highly valued alternative to remaining on the farm. And although a highly educated son is a source of pride to his family, the high cost of education can cause conflict. Money spent on one child's education may be resented by his siblings, who view his success as having taken place

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Hundreds of lineage members gather annually to pay their homage to their proto-ancestors who were buried at the same site. The gravesite is the most important symbolic center for lineage activities in rural Korea.

Second, because unilineal group membership is unambiguous, descent groups can perpetuate themselves over time even though their membership changes (as modern corporations can). **Corporate descent groups** are permanent units that have an existence beyond the individuals who are members at any given time. Old members die and new ones are admitted through birth, but the integrity of the corporate group persists. Such groups may own property and manage resources (just as a modern corporation does).

corporate descent groups Permanent kinship groups that have an existence beyond the membership at any given time.

Although systems of unilineal descent share certain basic similarities throughout the world, they do not operate exactly the same way in every society. In addition, as the description of the Korean village in the Anthropology Makes a Difference section in this chapter indicates, actual behavior in any society does not correspond exactly to the rules as they are defined in the kinship ideology. Systems of descent and kinship are basically a means by which a society relates to its environment and circumstances. As these conditions change, the rules of kinship, like other cultural ideals, are bent and manipulated so that a group may be successful. The accepted departures from the norm that exist in every society give unilineal systems a flexibility they would otherwise lack—a flexibility necessary for human adaptation.

at their expense and as possibly due to favoritism. Siblings also resent being left with the economically unrewarding burden of farming, as well as the burdens of ancestor worship and other lineage and village responsibilities. On their father's death, therefore, siblings may try to exclude the educated son from inheriting any family property.

Inheritance rules are also complicated by the status of women, who are legally entitled to an equal share of a family's property. In Pine Tree, however, a daughter's right to family property is considered terminated if her family has given her extensive gifts of cash, furniture, cloth, and jewelry on her marriage. A woman who has received such gifts is discouraged from claiming her legal share of family property, but many women do make such claims. Korean village women often assert their importance by participating in the rituals of ancestor worship (formally a male prerogative). This gives them a strong basis for claiming family property and may lead to conflict between brothers and sisters.

In-depth ethnography enables anthropologists to see how the realities of relationships play out to subvert the rules of kinship. In one family studied by Soo Choi, Sungjo, a frail child who had one brother and two sisters, was his mother's favorite. Sungjo's frailty did not bode well for success in farming, and his mother was determined to have him educated in the city. She finally persuaded her husband to sell one-third of their land to finance Sungjo's education. The sale was opposed by his siblings, who now had to work much harder to compensate for the lost income. To earn additional cash, the women family members wove cotton and silk cloth, and Sungjo's elder brother collected and sold natural lacquer extracted from the nearby woods.

After Sungjo's graduation from university, he worked for a big corporation and lived in Seoul in comfort. From his family's perspective, he neglected those left behind in the village. When his elder brother and one sister died young, their children blamed it on the sacrifices they had made for Sungjo's education. The elder brother, Sungman, had no sons. According to the cultural rules, his wife should have adopted Sungjo's oldest son as her heir, entitling this boy to perform the ancestral rites and ultimately inherit Sungman's property. But Sungman's wife refused to do this and performed the ancestor rites herself. When she became senile, her eldest daughter took over the performance of these rites and claimed the heir's right to Sungman's property. Sungjo opposed this claim and, after eight years of wrangling, finally prevailed in having his eldest son adopted by Sungman's family. Two years later, Sungman's wife died, and his daughter continued to perform the ancestor rites, although her claim to her parents' property was considerably weakened. As a married daughter, she was no longer considered part of her father's lineage, but that of her husband (as is common in patrilineal kinship systems), and she had neither legal nor cultural support for her claims. Sungjo's eldest sister, who stood to gain more from Sungjo's management of the property than that of her niece, allied with Sungjo to wrest the property from Sungman's daughter.

As we noted earlier, a central function of kinship rules is to smooth the transfer of office and property between generations. But, as Sungjo's family history illustrates, cultural rules may be broken to satisfy the demands of changing social circumstances. Cultural institutions like kinship are closely intertwined with economic systems, including access to land, wealth, and property. As economic systems change, people's behavior may depart from the rules. Under rapid economic change, as in Korea, exceptions to the rules become more frequent; ultimately the rules themselves may change, following changes in behavior.

Source: Adapted by permission of the author and publisher from Soo Ho Choi, "The Struggle for Family Succession and Inheritance in a Rural Korean Village," *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 1995, 51:329–346.

Anthropologists have offered a number of explanations for the evolution of unilineal descent groups. The common interests that cause people to join together and define themselves as a collective entity justified by kin relations are very diverse. These interests may be economic, such as land or cattle or gardens; they may be political or religious; or they may involve warfare within the society or with other societies. Kinship ideologies, which grow out of these varied common interests, take on a life of their own. With changing economic and historical circumstances, however, kinship ideologies can be manipulated and negotiated to fit new realities.

A group of kin whose members trace descent from a common ancestor and who can demonstrate those genealogical links among themselves is called a **lineage.** Lineages formed by descent through the male line are called **patrilineages.** Lineages formed by descent through the female line are called **matrilineages.** Lineages may vary in time depth, from three generations upward. Where lineages own land collectively and where the members are held responsible for one another's behavior, the lineage is considered a corporate group.

lineage A group of kin whose members trace descent from a known common ancestor.

patrilineage A lineage formed by descent in the male line.

matrilineage A lineage formed by descent in the female line.

Related lineages may form **clans.** The common clan ancestor may be a mythological figure; sometimes, no specific ancestor is known or named. A **phratry** is a unilineal descent group composed of a number of clans who feel themselves to be closely related. Clans are often named and may have a **totem**—a feature of the natural environment with which they are closely identified and toward which the clan members behave in a special way (see page 297 in Chapter 13).

Clans and lineages have different functions in different societies. The lineage is often a local residential or domestic group whose members cooperate on a daily basis. Clans are generally not residential units but tend to spread out over many villages. Therefore, clans often have political and religious functions rather than primarily domestic and economic ones.

One of the most important functions of a clan is to regulate marriage. In most societies, clans are governed by a rule of **exogamy.** The prohibition against marriage within the clan strengthens its unilineal character. If a person married within the clan, his or her children would find it difficult to make sharp distinctions between maternal and paternal relatives. Robert H. Lowie (1948:237) wrote of the Crow Indians of North America, among whom clans are very important, that in case of marriage within the clan, "a Crow. . . . loses his bearings and perplexes his tribesmen. For he owes specific obligations to his father's relatives and others to his mother's, who are now hopelessly confused. The sons of his father's clan ought to be censors; but now the very same persons are his joking relatives and his clan." Not only would this person not know how to act toward others, but others would not know how to act toward him. Clan exogamy also extends the network of peaceful social relations within a society as different clans are allied through marriage.

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Patrilineal extended families, typical of Arab Muslim communities, as in Jordan, emphasize consanguineal relationships in the male line.

clan A unilineal kinship group whose members believe themselves to be descended from a common ancestor but who cannot trace this link through known relatives.

phratry A unilineal descent group composed of a number of clans whose members feel themselves to be closely related.

totem An animal, plant, or other aspect of the natural world held to be ancestral or to have other intimate relationships with members of a group.

exogamy A rule specifying that a person must marry outside a particular group.

Patrilineal Descent Groups

In societies with patrilineal descent groups, a person (whether male or female) belongs to the descent group of the father, the father's father, and so on (see Figure 8.1).

Thus, a man, his sisters and brothers, his brother's children (but not his sister's children), his own children, and his son's children (but not his daughter's children) all belong to the same group. Inheritance moves from father to son, as does succession to office.

Nuer Patriliny The Nuer, a pastoral people who live in the Sudan in East Africa, have a patrilineal society. Among the Nuer, all rights, privileges, obligations, and interpersonal relationships are regulated by kinship; one is either a kinsman or an enemy. Membership in a patrilineal descent group is the most significant fact of life, and the father, his brothers, and their children are considered the closest kin. Membership in the patrilineage confers rights to land, requires participation in certain religious ceremonies, and determines political and judicial obligations, such as making alliances in feuds and warfare.

Nuer patrilineages have important political functions. Lineage membership may spread over several vil-

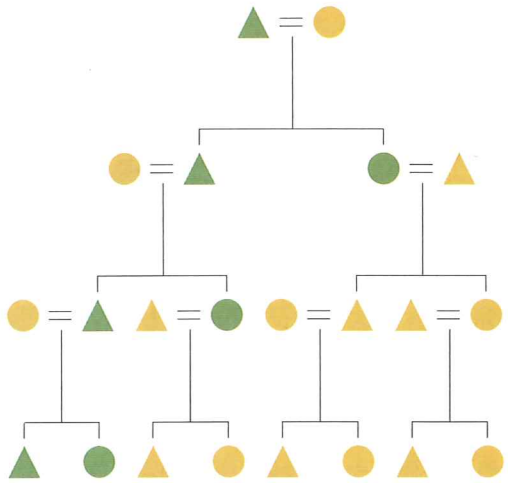


FIGURE 8.1 A patrilineal descent group. In societies with patrilineal descent groups, membership is based on links through the father only. Sons and daughters are members of their father's descent group (shown in dark green), as are the children of the sons, but not of daughters.

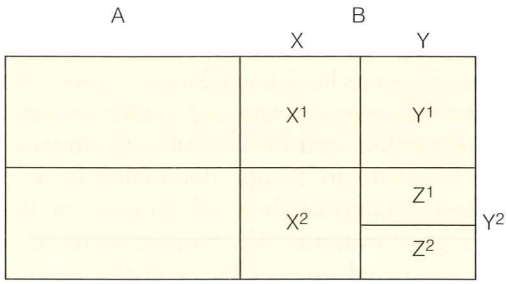


FIGURE 8.2 A segmentary lineage system with complementary opposition. Complementary opposition functions in the following way: when Z^1 fights Z^2, no other section gets involved. When Z^1 fights Y^1, Z^1 and Z^2 unite as Y^2. When Y^1 fights X^1, Y^1 and Y^2 unite, and so do X^1 and X^2. When X^1 fights A, X^1, X^2, Y^1, and Y^2 all unite as B. When A raids the Dinka (another tribe), A and B may unite. Source: Based on Evans-Pritchard in Marshall Sahlins, "The Segmentary Lineage: An Organization of Predatory Expansion," *American Anthropologist*, 1963:332–345. Reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press.

lages and thus help create alliances between otherwise independent villages. Each Nuer clan, which is viewed as composed of related lineages, not individuals, is also spread over several villages. Because a person cannot marry someone from within his or her own lineage or clan, or from the lineage of the mother, kinship relations extend widely throughout the tribe. In the absence of a centralized system of political control, these kinship-based alliances are an important mechanism of governance. Because the Nuer believe that kin should not fight with one another, disputes within the lineage or clan tend to be kept small and settled rapidly (Evans-Pritchard 1968/1940). However, because all who are not in some way kin are enemies, an attack on one lineage segment may cause all members of a clan to coalesce against a common enemy (Sahlins 1961). This **segmentary lineage system** has important political implications for the Nuer and helps integrate their tribal-level society.

The Nuer are divided into about 20 clans, each of which is further divided into lineages. Below the level of the clan are segments called maximal lineages, which are broken down into major lineages, spread over many villages. Major lineages are subdivided into minor lineages, which in turn are made up of minimal lineages. The minimal lineage contains three to five generations and is the basic descent group that functions in day-to-day activities. Members of a minimal lineage live in the same village and regard one another as close relatives. Minimal lineages are politically independent, and there is no formal or centralized leadership above this level. The higher-order lineages are called upon to function mainly in the context of conflict. They are not corporate groups; as Evans-Pritchard states, neither clans nor lineages have any corporate life, and their members do not live together. Rather, the coming together of members of clans and lineages occurs when lower-order segments come into conflict. In a serious dispute between members of different lower-order lineages, the higher-order lineage members take the side of their nearest kin. Thus, clans and lineages function as contingent alliance networks, rather than formal parts of the political structure. This kind of political structure, called **complementary opposition,** is illustrated in Figure 8.2.

A segmentary lineage system is particularly functional when stronger tribes want to expand into nearby territories held by weaker tribes. Complementary opposition directs the energies of the society upward, away from competition between kin, to an outside enemy. Lineage segments on the borders of other tribes know that if they attack an enemy, they will be helped by other lineages related to them at these higher levels of organization (Sahlins 1961).

Gender Relations in Patrilineal Societies The degree to which a woman is incorporated into the patrilineage of her husband and the degree of autonomy she has vary in different societies. In some cases a woman may retain rights of inheritance in her father's lineage. In general, however, in a patrilineal system great care is taken to guarantee the husband's rights and control over his wife (or wives) and children because the continuity of the descent group depends on this. Patrilineal systems most often have patrilocal rules of residence, so a wife may

segmentary lineage system A form of sociopolitical organization in which multiple descent groups (usually patrilineages) form at different levels and function in different contexts.

complementary opposition A political structure in which higher-order units form alliances that emerge only when lower-order units come into conflict.

find herself living among strangers, which tends to undermine female solidarity and support.

Anthropologists have had a long-standing interest in understanding the complexity and conflict present within patrilineal families, and in particular on understanding women's roles in kin groups dominated by men. Lila Abu-Lughod's (1993) analysis of families in the Arab world is a good example. The women in these families are often portrayed only in terms of the ideal kinship patterns of patrilineality, polygyny, and patrilateral parallel-cousin marriage. Analyses have focused on issues of honor and shame, with honor revolving around the male's ability to protect the sexuality of women in his family. But like Soo Choi, in his description of the Korean village (see "Anthropology Makes a Difference" in this chapter), Abu-Lughod's ethnography reveals that these generalizations gloss over many of the conflicts, doubts, and arguments of life as it is really lived. They portray life as static and timeless, ignoring changing motivations and historical circumstances. Abu-Lughod challenges these static pictures of authoritarian patriarchy by analyzing the stories Bedouin women tell about themselves: women who refuse their family's choice of a spouse, women who get along (or don't) with their co-wives, women who are sometimes disappointed in their sons, women who assert themselves against their husband's wishes; in short, women who rebel against the norms of their society in small and sometimes effective ways.

Social institutions and cultural ideologies are closely intertwined. Basic to these interrelationships are economic systems, which include access to production, wealth, and property. There are no cultures in which people always behave as they are supposed to, as the rules tell them to behave. However, as economic systems change, people's actual behavior tends to depart more frequently from the rules. When there is rapid economic change, as in Korea, exceptions to the rules become more and more common. Under the pressure of changing economic realities and behavioral adjustments, kinship systems, the rules themselves, may also change, but they tend to change much more slowly than behavior.

Matrilineal Descent Groups

Two fundamental ties recognized by every society are that between a woman and her children and that between siblings (brothers and sisters). In patrilineal societies, the most important source of male authority and control is the man's position as father and husband; in matrilineal societies, the most important male position is that of the mother's brother. In a matrilineal system, a man gains sexual and economic rights over a woman when he marries her, but he does not gain rights over her children. Children belong to the mother's descent group, not the father's, and many rights and responsibilities belong not to him but to the woman's brother. The membership of a matrilineal descent group (see Figure 8.3) consists of a woman, her brothers and sisters, her sisters' (but not her brothers') children, her own children, and the children of her daughters (but not of her sons).

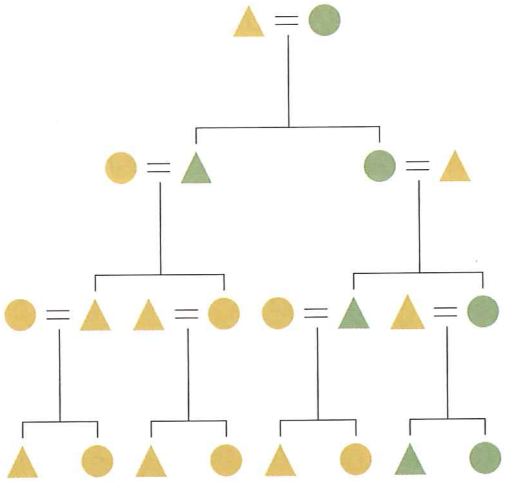


FIGURE 8.3 A matrilineal descent group. In a society with matrilineal descent groups, membership in the group is defined by links through the mother. Sons and daughters are members of their mother's descent group, as are the children of daughters, but not the children of sons.

Matrilineal systems tend to be correlated with a matrilocal rule of residence: a man goes to live with or near his wife's kin after marriage. This means that in the domestic group, the man is among strangers, whereas his wife is surrounded by her kin. The husband plays a far less important role in the household in a matrilineal system than in a patrilineal one, and marriages in matrilineal societies tend to be less stable than those in other systems. In some cases, as among the Nayar of India, described in a classic ethnography (Gough 1961), it is possible for a matrilineally organized group to do away with the presence of husbands and fathers altogether, as long as there are brothers who assume responsibilities. It is important to remember that although women usually have higher status in societies in which there is a matrilineal reckoning of descent, matrilineality is not the same as matriarchy, in which the formal positions of power are held by women. With a few possible exceptions (A. Wallace 1970), the most important resources and highest political positions in matrilineal societies are in the control of males, although the male with the most power and control in these societies is not the husband (father) but the brother (uncle). The role of the mother's brother is an important or special one even in patrilineal societies, but in matrilineal societies it is particularly important. The mother's brother is a figure of authority and respect, and the children of a man's sister, rather than his own, are his heirs and successors.

In a matrilineal society, the relationship between a man and his son is likely to be affectionate and loving

because it is free of the problems of authority and control that exist between fathers and sons in a patrilineal society. A man may feel emotionally close to his sons, but he is committed to pass on his knowledge, property, and offices to the sons of his sister. With his nephews he may have less friendly relations or even conflicts because they are subject to his control. Thus, in a matrilineal system a man's loyalties are split between his own sons and the sons of his sister; in a patrilineal system, this tension does not occur as part of the kinship structure.

Double Descent

When descent is traced through a combination of matrilineal and patrilineal principles, the system is referred to as **double descent.** Double descent systems occur in only 5 percent of the world's cultures. In these societies, a person belongs both to the patrilineal group of the father and to the matrilineal group of the mother, but these descent groups operate in different areas of life.

The Yako of Nigeria have a system of double descent (Forde 1950). Cooperation in daily domestic life is strongest among patrilineally related kinsmen, who live with or near one another and jointly control and farm plots of land. Membership in the patriclan is the source of rights over farmland and forest products. One obligation of the patriclan is to provide food at funerals. Membership in the men's associations and the right to fruit trees are inherited through the male line. The arbitration of disputes is in the hands of senior patriclan members. Cooperation in ritual and succession to some religious offices are also derived from patriclan membership.

Matrilineal bonds and clan membership are also important in Yako society, even though matriclan members do not live near one another and do not cooperate as a group in everyday activities. The rights and duties of matrilineal kinship are different from those of patrilineal kinship. Practical assistance to matrilineal kin, the rights and obligations of the mother's brother and sons, and the authority of the priest of a matrilineal clan are based on mystical ideas regarding the perpetuation and tranquility of the Yako world. The Yako believe that the fertility of crops, beasts, and humans, and peace between individuals and within the community are associated with and passed on through women. Life comes from the mother. The children of one mother are bound to mutual support and peaceful relations. The matrilineage is thus held together by mystical bonds of common fertility, and anger and violence between its members are considered sinful. These sentiments are reinforced in the cult of the matriclan spirits, whose priests are ritually given the qualities of women.

Despite their isolation from one another by the rule of patrilocal residence, matriclan relatives have specific mutual obligations. Rights in the transfer of accumulated wealth, but not land, belong to the matrilineal kinship group. The members of matriclans supervise funerals and arrange for the disposal of the personal property of the dead. All currency and livestock customarily pass to matrilineal relatives, who also receive the greater share of tools, weapons, and household goods. The movable property of women passes to their daughters. Matriclans are responsible for the debts of their kin, for making loans to one another at reasonable rates, and for providing part of the bridewealth transferred at the marriage of a sister's son.

Thus, for the Yako, paternity and maternity are both important in descent. Each contains different qualities from which flow the rights, obligations, and benefits, both practical and spiritual, that bind people to one another and ensure the continuity of the society.

Nonunilineal Kinship Systems

About 40 percent of the world's societies are structured around kinship systems that are **nonunilineal,** or **cognatic.** These systems are further divided into bilateral and ambilineal descent. In systems of bilateral descent, an individual is considered to be related equally to other kin through both the mother's and the father's side. In a unilineal kinship system, an individual is formally affiliated with a large number of relations extended lineally through time, but only on one side of the family; in a system of bilateral descent, both maternal and paternal lines are used in reckoning descent, in establishing the rights and obligations of kinship, and in forming social groups. Bilateral kinship systems appear to be particularly adaptive in societies in which mobility and independence are important. They are basic to Western culture, including the United States, and predominate among foraging societies as well.

The people linked by bilateral kin networks are called a **kindred.** A kindred is not a group, but rather a network of relations with a single group of siblings at the center. With the exception of brothers and sisters, every individual's kindred is different from every other individual's. Kindreds are actually overlapping categories of kin, rather than social groups, and are more difficult to organize as cooperative, kin-based collectivities. For example, because a kindred is not a group but rather an ego-centered network, it cannot own land or have continuity over time.

double descent The tracing of descent through both matrilineal and patrilineal links, each of which is used for different purposes.

nonunilineal descent Any system of descent in which both father's and mother's lineages have equal claim to the individual.

cognatic descent Any nonunilineal system of descent.

kindred A unique kin network made up of all the people related to a specific individual in a bilateral kinship system.

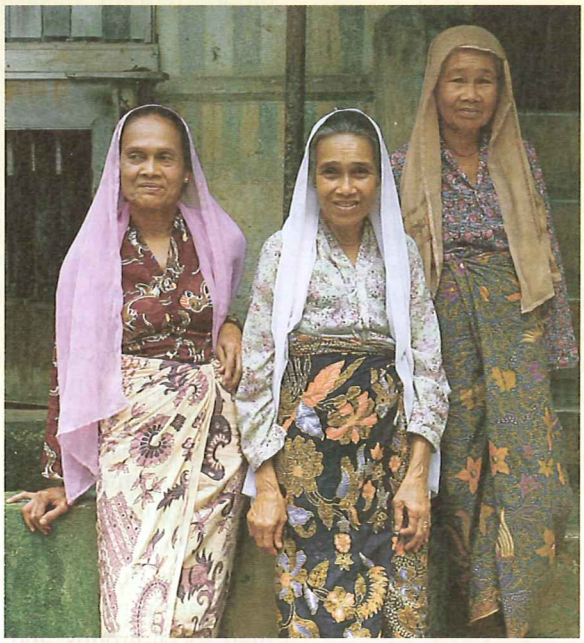
Ethnography

The Matrilineal Minangkabau of Sumatra

The Minangkabau, a rice-growing society in Western Sumatra, Indonesia, is one of the few matrilineal Islamic societies in South Asia. In Minangkabau villages, kinship relations and families are organized around mothers and their daughters and sons. Life-cycle ceremonies, a key feature of Minangkabau culture, are organized by women and their brothers and presided over by senior males. The field research of Evelyn Blackwood, a feminist anthropologist, demonstrates that Minangkabau women wield significant informal power in their families and in their matrilineages, based on their ownership of rice land, their significant participation in decisions regarding life-cycle ceremonies, matrilocal residence of daughters after marriage, and matrilineal inheritance in which property and land are transmitted from mothers to daughters.

The "big house," or "matrihouse," is a central site of Minangkabau social relations, and usually contains an extended family of three or four generations, including a senior woman, her daughter(s), their husbands, and children. Compartments at the back of the big house are for the mother and her daughters, and the front half of the house is an open space for public gatherings and ceremonies. The central house post is identified with the senior woman, who is called "the central pillar of the big house."

When a daughter marries, she and her husband move into her big house. Each newly married daughter resides with her husband at the end compartment farthest from the central house post, and elder married sisters move down the line of compartments toward the central post. Sons leave the house at marriage to move in with their wives, but one room next to the kitchen is designated as the men's room, for any divorced or widowed men forced to return home.



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In spite of the pressures of Islam, Christianity, Indonesian national culture, and the global economy, the most important group in Minangkabau society is the three-generational matrilineal descent group.

Women are not only symbolically identified with the core (pillar) of the house, but also dominate the house in daily life and during ceremonies. A senior woman and her daughters are the core of the house. Because sons marry out, they are not part of the daily life of the house, and even the senior male, or mother's brother, takes center stage only temporarily when he presides over ceremonies. The conjugal unit of husband and wife is a subsidiary unit within the matrilineal extended family, and husbands are peripheral to household affairs, most often away during the day working, returning to the house only in the evenings.

The composition of any particular matrihouse varies: it may be a several-generation extended family, or a two-generation household of adult women, that is, a mother and recently married daughter. Mother-daughter relations are the key to the actual composition of a matrihouse. Matrihouses continue from generation to generation as daughters are born, marry, bear children, and eventually become senior women themselves. Usually only one of a woman's daughters will actually live with her husband and children in the matrihouse; other daughters and their descendants may split and establish their own houses, often close by. Thus, over generations matrihouses may develop into a cluster of houses of related kinswomen.

Matrilineal inheritance of property is key to female power in the household. Women have rights as heirs to and controllers of matrilineal property, and their daughters inherit the right to land and its disposition. Once a daughter is given land by her mother after marriage, it is under her control. The daughter decides how to use it and what to do with its produce, although she cannot pawn it without her mother's permission. No one can interfere with a senior woman's right to use and dispose of her land as she wishes. Sons may be given use rights to land if land is available and their mothers are willing to

help them out, but they cannot pass matrilineal land on to their children. The members of a matrihouse share resources in complex ways, guided by the Minangkabau value on mutual cooperation and assistance among kin, as well as the belief that those who earn an income have some rights over how to dispose of it. A family's main income comes from the rice land belonging to the matrihouse, which is controlled by the senior woman, who uses the income to pay for common household needs. In some matrihouses, mother and daughters share the produce of their undivided rice fields; in other cases, daughters also have access to their own income, either from their husbands, through their own labor, or from small-scale businesses, and may use some of this income for joint projects benefiting the matrihouse.

All matrihouse members are expected to contribute some form of unpaid labor or cash to the household. Mothers may leave small children with a variety of adults; both boys and girls watch younger siblings; girls help their mothers clean the house; boys tend to small animals. Young unmarried daughters weed the rice fields; adult daughters plant, weed, and harvest rice on the family land. Unmarried sons help with the harvest and transport unhusked rice to be milled. This expectation of cooperation is buttressed by the "rule" of the senior woman and respect for and deference to elders. As senior women become elderly, the management of the household falls more to their daughters, as do the work and supervision of the rice fields.

Although married sons are not present in the daily life of the matrihouse, they remain kinsmen of the house with certain responsibilities and obligations, contingent on age and rank. Sons maintain a strong interest in and support for their natal kin group, and a son's cooperation with his mother helps ensure her continued support of his interests. A mother displeased with her son may take back some rice land she has given him, or refuse him return to the house after a divorce, although that is a male right. Apart from practical interests, a man feels emotionally tied to his mother. Young unmarried Minangkabau men who work for wages in other parts of Indonesia usually send home some of their wages to their mothers, or they may work in their mothers' rice fields. These filial obligations last throughout a man's lifetime. Even after marriage, a son remains part of the matrilineal family with a voice in family matters and even substantial influence if he has proven a reliable helper to the matrihouse.

Sons-in-law, unlike sons, are peripheral to the matrihouse; in the past a son-in-law was only a temporary resident in his wife's family house, visiting at night and returning to his mother's house in the morning. Although a husband is now a more permanent part of his wife's house, he is still regarded more as an "honored, but relatively insecure, guest" than as part of the family. As "guest" residents, husbands provide additional labor, land, or income to the household but do not participate in decision making in their wives' lineage affairs. Husbands are expected to have their own source of income, through agricultural or wage labor, which they usually use for expenses associated with raising their children. Men have discretion in spending their income but are subject to strong pressure to be good providers for their wives' families.

A man's duty to provide material assistance to both his own matrilineage and his wife's family creates tensions for men pulled between their responsibilities as husbands and as sons, between financially assisting their wives' families and their own natal family. Mothers and sisters feel they have a right to make claims to a man's income, and there are no set rules for dividing income between the wife's matrihouse and the natal house. Men also maintain enduring ties with their children, even after divorce or remarriage. This, too, may cause tension as a man is pulled between leaving his assets to his own children or to his sister's children. As husbands, then, men are valued for their labor and income, however supplemental, as well as their reproductive capabilities, but they are subordinate in the household. A senior woman does not control her son-in-law's behavior, but he must show his respect by working hard for the household. If he does not, his marriage and relations with his wife's kin will be negatively affected.

The traditional matrilineal orientation of the Minangkabau conflicts with the patrilineal and patriarchal orientation of other ideologies to which the Minangkabau are subjected. In the last century, the Dutch colonialists, consistent with Western ideals, attempted to put land in men's hands. Both Islam and contemporary Indonesian nationalism emphasize males as household heads, women as dependent caretakers of home and family, and the primacy of patrilineal relations as the basis of family and community life. Participation in the capitalist global economy, which offers more wage work to men than to women, also supports the movement from female to male dominance in families. In spite of these influences, however, a matrilineal ideology and its associated practices continue to hold a predominant place in Minangkabau life.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. What are the sources of women's power among the Minangkabau?
2. What are the most important male and female roles in Minangkabau society?
3. Compare the sources of conflict in a matrilineal society like the Minangkabau with those in a patrilineal society.

Source: Evelyn Blackwood, *Webs of Power: Women, Kin, and Community in a Sumatran Village*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000.

In an ambilineal system, individuals may choose to affiliate with either their mother's or their father's descent group, but not simultaneously with both. **Ambilineal descent** is found in many Pacific Island societies. In these, at marriage, the new couple chooses to live with and identify with either spouse's descent group. Generally, which descent group a couple chooses depends on a variety of factors. The most important of these is probably access to land, a resource in particularly short supply on many Pacific Islands, but friendships and politics also play important roles in such identification. One interesting aspect of ambilineal kinship is that the ancestors of a child might be quite different from the ancestors of his or her parents.

The Classification of Kin

In all societies, kin are referred to by special terms. The total system of kinship terms and the rules for using these terms make up a kinship classification system. In every system of kinship terminology, some relatives are classed together (referred to by the same kinship term), whereas other relatives are differentiated from each other (called by different terms). Kinship systems vary in the degree to which they have different kinship terms for different relatives. Some kinship systems have only a small number of kinship terms, whereas others have a different term for almost every relative.

The ways in which kin are classified are associated with the roles they play in society. If a person refers to his father and his father's brothers by the same term, the social roles he plays with respect to these individuals will tend to be similar. By the same token, if he uses one term to refer to his father and another to refer to his father's brothers, there will probably be a difference in behavior as well. He will probably behave one way to his father and a different way to his father's brothers. For example, in American society, a mother-in-law and a mother's brother's wife are both relations by marriage. However, only one of them—mother-in-law—is distinguished terminologically; mother's sister and mother's brother's wife are both lumped together under one term—aunt. Given this, an anthropologist would expect that behavior toward the mother would be different than behavior toward the mother-in-law, but behavior toward mother's brother's wife and mother's sister would be about the same. Of course, although kinship terms refer to behavioral expectations, actual behavior is modified by individual personality differences and special circumstances.

Understanding kinship classification systems is not just an interesting anthropological game. Kinship classification is one of the important regulators of behavior in most societies, outlining each person's rights and obligations and specifying the ways in which a person must act toward others and they toward him or her. Kinship classification systems are also related to other aspects of culture: the types of social groups that are formed, the systems of marriage and inheritance, and even deeper and broader cultural values.

A Comparison of Kinship Classification in North India and the United States

As an American woman married to a North Indian man, I (Nanda, one of this text's authors) was instructed in how to behave with various relatives. My relationship with my husband's brothers and their wives is regulated by the principle of seniority, which is absent in American kinship classification. My husband's elder brother is my *jait* and his wife is my *jaitani.* I must treat both of them with deference, similar to that shown to my father-in-law, by adding the suffix *-ji* to their kinship terms, touching their feet when I meet them, and refraining from using their first names. But my husband's younger brother, who is my *deva,* and his wife, who is my *devrani,* may be treated with the friendly informality more characteristic of sister and brother-in-law relations in the United States. On our trips to India, I can greet my husband's younger brother with an embrace and talk with him in a joking, familiar manner, but I must never embrace my husband's elder brother, even though I feel equally friendly toward him and like him equally well.

A comparison of kinship terms in India and the United States shows that one immediately apparent difference is in the number of kinship terms; 45 in North India but only 22 in the United States. This is because the North Indian system distinguishes several kinds of kin that North Americans group together; this reflects the greater flexibility in behavior toward kin that is acceptable in North America (see Figure 8.4).

Many of the North Indian cultural patterns that underlie its kinship terminology are based on the importance of the patrilineal, patrilocal extended family (the importance of the male principle in inheritance and seniority). These include the lower status of the family of the bride compared to that of the groom; the obligations a male child has toward his parents, including the specific ritual obligations of the eldest son; and the ritual roles played by various kin in life-cycle ceremonies such as marriage and funerals. These patterns are based on two major principles of Indian culture and social organization: hierarchy and the importance of the group. The contrasting Western values of equality, individualism,

ambilineal descent A form of bilateral descent in which an individual may choose to affiliate with either the father's or mother's descent group.

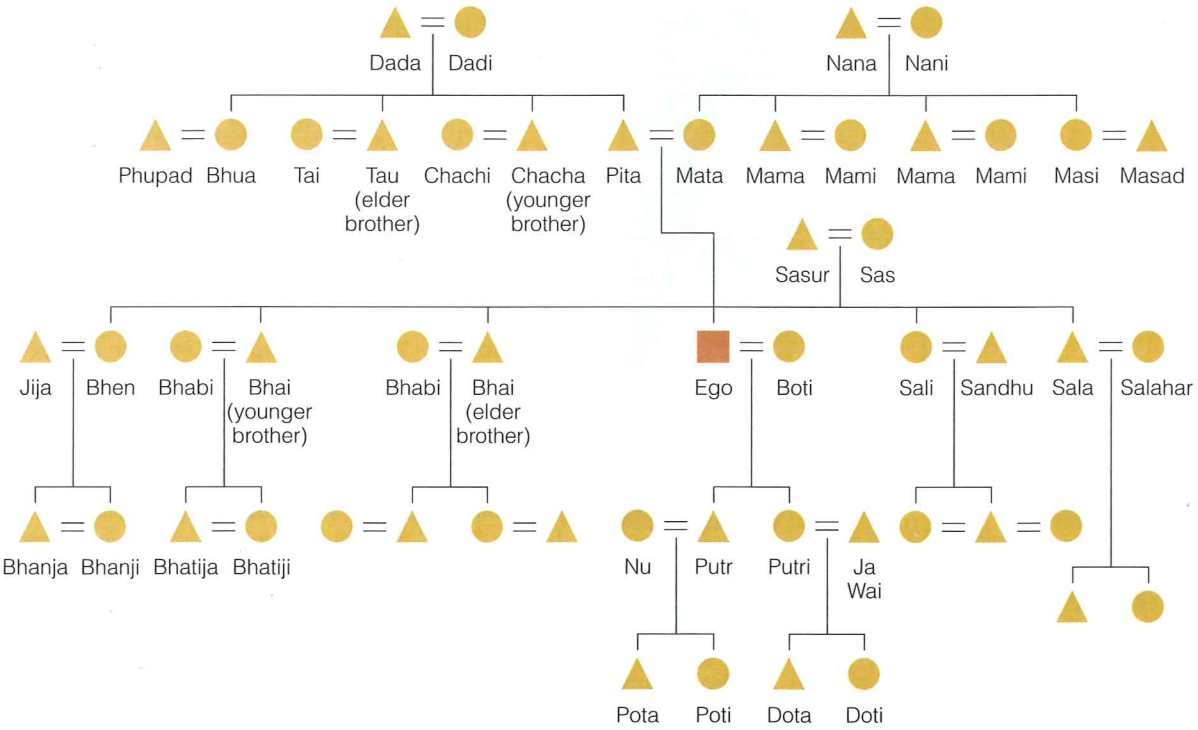


FIGURE 8.4 Kinship classification in North India: terms of reference from a male's perspective. (*Note:* There is no term for a man's nieces and nephews on his wife's side. They are referred to descriptively as wife's sister's daughters or sons.) Not shown on the diagram are the terms a wife uses for her husband's sister, her husband's sister's husband, her husband's elder brother, his wife, her husband's younger brother, and his wife, which adds 6 terms to the 39 used by a male to describe his kin.

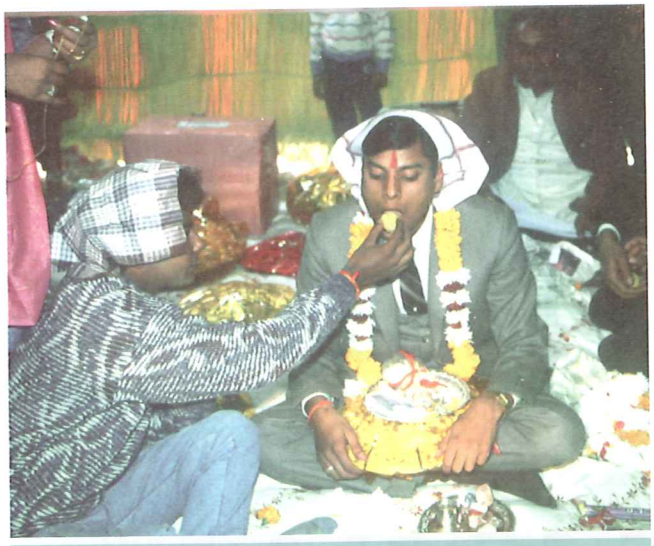
and the nuclear family are expressed in North American kinship terminology.

The principle of relative age, which is an aspect of hierarchy, is critical in the Indian kinship system but absent in North America. Thus, a man uses different terms to refer to his father's elder brother (*tau*) and his father's younger brother (*chacha*), and this carries over to their wives; his father's elder brother's wife is *tai* and his father's younger brother's wife is *chachi*. This terminological difference reflects the respect attached to seniority. Out of respect for the principle of hierarchy, it is still common for many North Indian women to cover their hair, if not their faces, in the presence of both the father-in-law and the husband's elder brother.

A second principle that complicates the Indian kinship system from the point of view of a Westerner is the Indian differentiation of kin according to whether they are from the mother's side or the father's side of the family. This principle (bifurcation) is absent in English kinship terminology. In North India, the father's brothers and the mother's brothers are called by different terms, as are the father's and mother's parents: *Dadi* and *dada* are the grandparents on the father's side, and *nani* and *nana* are the grandparents on the mother's side. These distinctions reflect the Indian principle of respect and formality associated with the male side of the family and the more open show of affection permitted with the maternal side of the family.

The Indian principles of hierarchy and patriarchy turn up again in the higher status accorded the family of the husband's relatives. This status inequality is reflected in a number of ways in Indian kinship terminology and behavior, such as the distinction between a man's wife's brother (*sala*) and his sister's husband (*jija*). Both relations are called *brother-in-law* in the English system, reflecting the general equality in North America of the husband's and wife's sides of the family. In India, a man's sister's husband is in a higher position relative to him than is his wife's brother. Correspondingly, a sister's husband is treated with great respect, whereas a wife's brother may be treated more ambivalently and may be the target of jokes. The behavioral expectations of this unequal relationship between the bride's and groom's families extend even beyond immediate relatives, to relatives of relatives by marriage.

The kinship and other cultural rules that structure relationships between kin in North India, like those in the Korean village, are important. But their functions in guiding behavior, just like their functions in succession and inheritance described for Korea, are resisted and manipulated in response to pragmatic interest, social circumstances, and emotion. Contesting claims over family property may lead to alliances within the family that contrast with cultural rules about seniority and patriarchal power. Illness of some family members also may direct the flow of resources in directions not covered, and even in opposition to, kinship rules governing reciprocity.



© Joan Gegg

In the many rituals involved in an Indian wedding, specific relatives have specific obligations. Here, elder male members of the bride's family perform the ritual of giving sweet food to the groom.

As a close examination of kinship in any society reveals, our understanding of culture and society must be based not just on people's notions about ideal behavior but also the realities of the strategies all people use to negotiate their adaptation to life's contingencies. "The Global and the Local" feature at the end of this chapter indicates some of the ways in which global migration has altered the realities of kinship relations among many immigrant communities.

In addition to informing us about the behavior of people in other societies, the study of kinship systems goes to a fundamental point of anthropology. Most Americans consider it normal and natural to use our kin system. We "automatically" call our parents' brothers and sisters "aunt" and "uncle" and their children "cousin." We feel that this represents an obvious underlying biological reality and find it hard to understand how other people could use different systems. We tend to ignore questions our system raises, such as why we use the same word for our mother's sister, and our mother's brother's wife, or why there are no separate terms for male and female cousins but we do differentiate nieces from nephews. These discrepancies point to a basic fact: kinship systems use the metaphor of biology, but they are social systems, not biological ones. The systems used by other societies feel as natural to their members as ours does to us.

lineal kin Blood relations linked through descent, such as Ego, Ego's mother, Ego's grandmother, and Ego's daughter.

collateral kin Kin descended from a common ancestor but not in a direct ascendent or descendent line, such as siblings and cousins.

Principles for Classifying Kin

Kinship can be described using a series of abstract, logical principles. The interesting thing is that the combination of these principles results in kinship systems that are extremely logical, yet very different from our own. Societies differ in the categories of relatives they distinguish and the principles by which kin are classified. To understand the rules by which kin are classified, we must first establish the position of the individual from whose perspective the system is seen. We refer to this person as "Ego." For example, if you were to describe your family from your perspective (I have three siblings, two aunts and uncles on my mother's side. . . .) you would be "Ego." If you were to do the same thing from your cousin's perspective, then he or she would be "Ego." Once we have established Ego, we can examine how different categories of kin are grouped and distinguished according to the following seven principals.

Generation The generation principle distinguishes ascending and descending generations from Ego. In American society, you, your brothers and sisters, and the children of your parents' brothers and sisters are members of the same generation. Your parents and their brothers and sisters (as well as the spouses of those brothers and sisters) are members of the ascending generation above you. Your children, as well as those of your siblings and cousins, are members of the descending generation below you. It is important to understand that generation is different from age. It is fairly common for some members of your parents' generation to be the same age as some members of your generation, or even younger.

Relative Age A kinship system that uses the relative age principle has different kinship terms for relatives that are older than oneself and relatives that are younger than oneself. English kinship terminology does not recognize this principle.

Lineality versus Collaterality Kin related in a single line, such as grandfather–father–son, are called **lineal kin.** **Collateral kin** are descended from a common ancestor with Ego but are not Ego's direct ascendants or descendants. For example, brothers and sisters (siblings) and cousins are collateral kin. They are descended from the same ancestors but are not in a direct ascendant or descendant line. In many societies, collaterality is not distinguished in the kinship terminology. Ego may refer to both his father and father's brother as father. Both the mother and her sisters may similarly be called mother.

Gender Kinship systems that use the principle of gender have different kin terms for people of different genders. In English, some kinship terms differentiate by gender,

such as aunt, uncle, and brother; the word cousin, however, does not differentiate by gender. In some other cultures, all kinship terms distinguish gender.

Consanguineal versus Affinal Kin People related to Ego by blood **(consanguinity)** are distinguished from similar relationships by marriage. For example, English kinship terminology distinguishes sister from sister-in-law, father from father-in-law, and so on. The English word uncle, however, does not distinguish between consanguineal and affinal relationships; it is applied equally to the brother of our father or mother, and to the husband of our father's or mother's sister.

Side of the Family Some societies use a kinship system in which kin terms distinguish between relatives from the mother's side of the family and those from the father's side. This principle is called **bifurcation.** An example would be societies in which the mother's brother is referred to differently from the father's brother. This principle is not used in English kinship terminology.

Sex of Linking Relative In societies in which distinguishing collateral relatives is an important principle of kinship classification, the sex of the linking relative may be important in the kinship terminology. A linking relative is an individual, related to you consanguineally, that connects you to another relative. For example, if your mother's sister has children, you are linked to those children through your mother's sister. In this case the linking relative is female. If your mother's brother has children, you are linked to those children through him and the sex of the linking relative is male. When the sex of your parent and the linking relative are the same, the children to whom you are linked are known as **parallel cousins** (so, these are the children of your mother's sisters or your father's brothers). If the sex of your parent and the linking relative are different, the children to whom you are linked are known as your **cross cousins** (so, these are the children of your mother's brothers and your father's sisters). In many societies (though not in America) people use different kin terms for parallel and cross cousins. They usually are further distinguished according to whether the linking relative is from the matrilineal or patrilineal line. This is particularly important where Ego is prohibited from marrying a parallel cousin but may, or even must, marry a cross cousin.

Types of Kinship Terminologies

The seven principles just listed are combined to form seven different systems of kinship. These systems were first described by Lewis Henry Morgan in the 19th century. With one exception, he gave them the names of Native American groups: Hawaiian, Eskimo, Iroquois, Omaha, Crow, and Sudanese. In some cases, these names reflect 19th-century terminology. For example, even though the Eskimo call themselves "Inuit" we still talk about Eskimo kinship terminology. Although the groups that Morgan identified do use the kin terminology he associated with them, Morgan intended for his terminology to be much broader than this. He wanted to classify all the world's kinship systems. So, for example, the Iroquois use the Iroquois kin system but this system is also used by the Yanomamo, a South American group, some villages in rural China, and many other groups around the world.

Systems of kinship terminology reflect the kinds of kin groups that are most important in a society. Each of these systems is described briefly in the following sections. You will find that careful attention to the accompanying diagrams will help you understand the descriptions.

Hawaiian As its name suggests, the Hawaiian system is found in Polynesia. It is rather simple in that it uses the fewest kinship terms. The Hawaiian system emphasizes the distinctions between generations and reflects the equality between the mother's and the father's sides of the family in relation to Ego. All relatives of the same generation and sex—for example, father, father's brother, and mother's brother—are referred to by the same kinship term. Male and female kin in Ego's generation are distinguished in the terminology, but the terms for sister and brother are the same as those for the children of one's parents' siblings (see Figure 8.5). This system correlates with ambilineality and ambilocality, which means that depending on circumstances and choice a person may belong to either the mother's or father's descent group. Using the same terms for parents and their siblings establishes closeness with a large number of relatives in the ascending generation, giving Ego a wide choice in deciding which group to affiliate and live with.

Eskimo The Eskimo terminology, found among hunting-and-gathering peoples in North America, is correlated with bilateral descent. The Eskimo system emphasizes the nuclear family by using terms for its members (mother, father, sister, brother, daughter, son) that are not used for any other kin. Outside the nuclear family, many kinds of relatives that are distinguished in other systems are lumped together. We have already given the examples of aunt and uncle. Similarly, all children of the kin in the parental generation are

consanguinity Blood ties between people.

bifurcation A principle of classifying kin under which different kinship terms are used for the mother's side of the family and the father's side of the family.

parallel cousins The children of a parent's same-sex siblings (mother's sisters, father's brothers).

cross cousins The children of a parent's siblings of the opposite sex (mother's brothers, father's sisters).

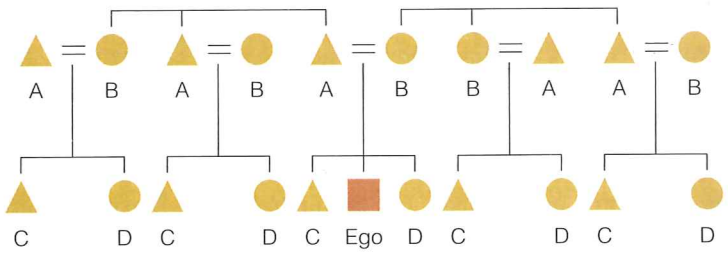


FIGURE 8.5 Hawaiian kinship. The primary distinctions in Hawaiian kinship are between men and women and between generations. All members of Ego's generation are designated by the same terms Ego uses for brother and sister. All members of Ego's parents' generation are designated by the same terms Ego uses for mother and father.

called cousins, no matter what their sex or who the linking relative is. The Eskimo system singles out the biologically closest group of relations (the nuclear family) and treats more distant kin more or less equally (see Figure 8.6).

Iroquois The Iroquois system is associated with matrilineal or double descent and emphasizes the importance of unilineal descent groups. In this system, the same term is used for mother and mother's sister, and a common term also applies to father and father's brother. Parallel cousins are referred to by the same terms as those for brother and sister. Father's sister and mother's brother are distinguished from other kin, as are the children of father's sister and mother's brother (Ego's cross cousins) (see Figure 8.7).

Omaha The Omaha system is found among patrilineal peoples, including the Native American group of that name. In this system, the same term is used for father and father's brother and for mother and mother's sister. Parallel cousins are equated with siblings, but cross cousins are referred to by separate terms. A man refers to his brother's children by the same terms he applies to his own children, but he refers to his sister's children by different terms. These terms are extended to all relations who are classified as Ego's brothers and sisters (see Figure 8.8). In this system, there is a merging of generations on the mother's side. All men who are members of Ego's mother's patrilineage will be called "mother's brother" regardless of their age or generational relationship to Ego. Thus, the term applied to mother's brother is also applied to the son of mother's brother.

This generational merging is not applied to relations on the father's side. Although father and his brothers are referred to by the same term, this does not extend to the descending generation. The different terminology applied to the father's and the mother's patrilineal groups reflects the different position of Ego in relation to these kin. Generational differences are important on the father's side because members of the ascending generation are likely to have some authority over Ego (as his father does) and be treated differently from patrilineage members of Ego's own generation. The mother's patrilineage is unimportant to Ego in this system, and this is reflected by lumping them all together in the terminology.

Crow The Crow system, named for the Crow Indians of North America, is the matrilineal equivalent of the Omaha system. This means that the relations on the male side (Ego's father's matrilineage) are lumped together, whereas generational differences are recognized in the mother's matrilineal group (see Figure 8.9). In both the Omaha and Crow systems, the overriding importance of unilineality leads to the subordination of other principles of classifying kin, such as relative age or generation.

Sudanese No North American groups used Morgan's final kinship system, so he named it Sudanese, after the African groups, primarily in Ethiopia, who do use it. It's also used

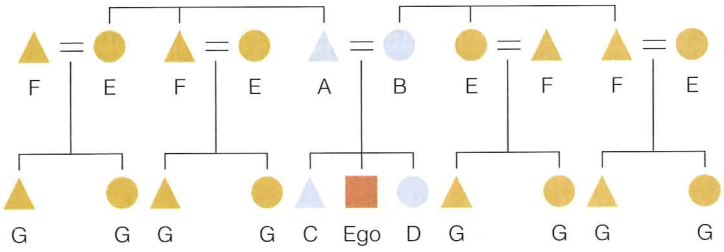


FIGURE 8.6 Eskimo kinship. A critical distinction in Eskimo kinship is between lineal and collateral relations. Ego uses one set of terms to refer to lineal relations (A, B, C, and D) and a second set to refer to collateral relations (E, F, and G).

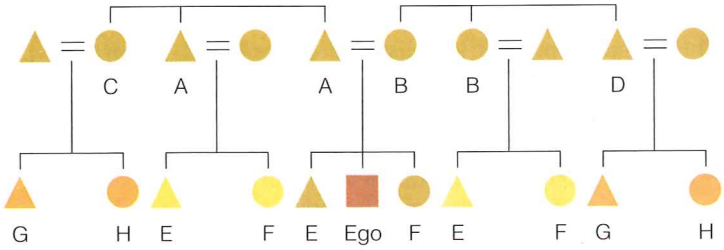


FIGURE 8.7 Iroquois kinship. The Iroquois system is found in societies with unilineal descent. It distinguishes mother's side of the family (B and D) from father's side of the family (A and C), and cross cousins (in orange) from parallel cousins (in yellow).

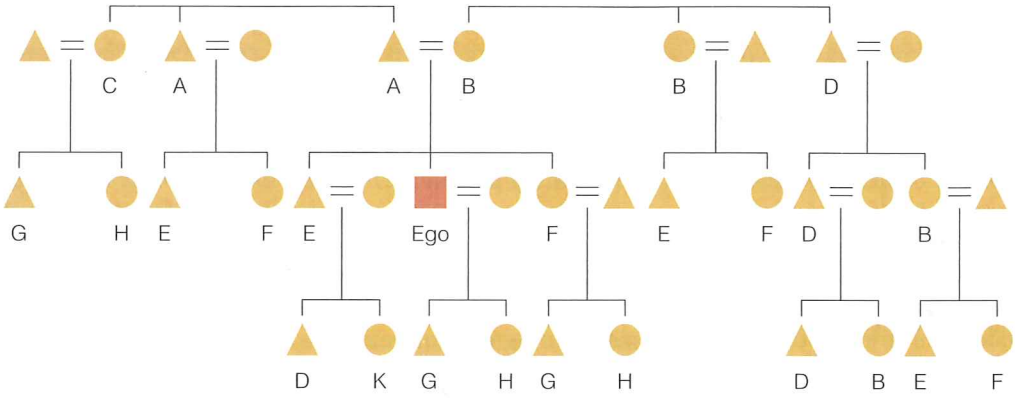


FIGURE 8.8 Omaha kinship. The Omaha is a bifurcate merging system found among patrilineal people. Like the Iroquois system, it merges father and father's brother and mother and mother's sister. However, in addition, the Omaha system merges generation on the mother's side. So, men who are members of Ego's mother's patrilineage are referred to by the same term as for mother's brother, regardless of age or generation.

in some places in Turkey and was used in Ancient Rome. Sudanese is the most descriptive terminology system. The types included here use different terms for practically every relative: siblings, paternal parallel cousins, maternal parallel cousins, paternal cross cousins, and maternal cross cousins. Ego refers to his or her parents by terms distinct from those for father's brother, father's sister, mother's sister, and mother's brother (see Figure 8.10). The groups using Sudanese kinship tend to be strongly patrilineal and very concerned with issues of wealth, class, and political power.

The great variety of kinship terminologies underscores the fact that kinship systems reflect social relationships and are not based simply on biological relations between people. Kinship classification systems are part of the totality of a kinship system. Each type of classification emphasizes the most important kinship groupings and relationships in the societies that use it. Thus, the Eskimo system emphasizes the importance of the nuclear family, setting it apart from more distant relations on the maternal and paternal sides. The Iroquois, Omaha, and Crow systems, found in unilineal societies, emphasize the importance of lineage and clan. In the Hawaiian system, the simplicity of terms leaves the way open for flexibility in choosing one's descent group.

In making sense out of kinship systems, anthropologists attempt to understand the relationship of terminologies, rules of descent, and kinship groups to the ecological, economic, and political conditions under which different kinship systems emerge and change. Re-emerging as a topic of central interest in anthropology, studies on the structure and ideologies of kinship become frameworks for examining a range of related subjects: new kinship and family forms (e.g., domestic partnerships), new reproductive technologies, social mobility within family genealogies, gender relations in both colonial and contemporary societies, and new constructions of "blood" relations. We take up some of these topics in the next chapter.

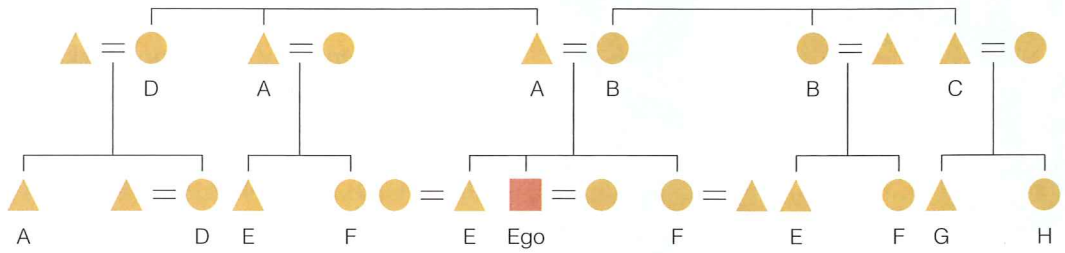


FIGURE 8.9 Crow kinship. The Crow system is similar to the Omaha but is found among matrilineal people. Like the Omaha and Iroquois, it merges father with father's brother and mother with mother's sister. However, unlike the Omaha, it merges generation on the father's side so that all women who are members of the father's matrilineage are referred to with the term for father's sister, regardless of age or generation.

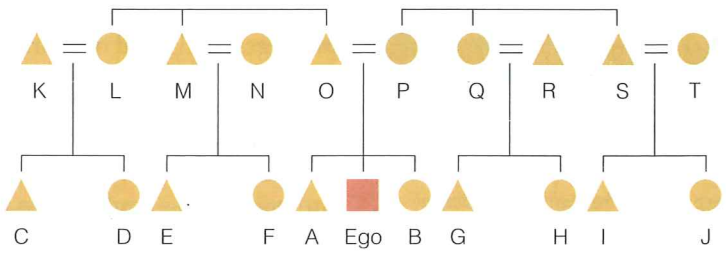
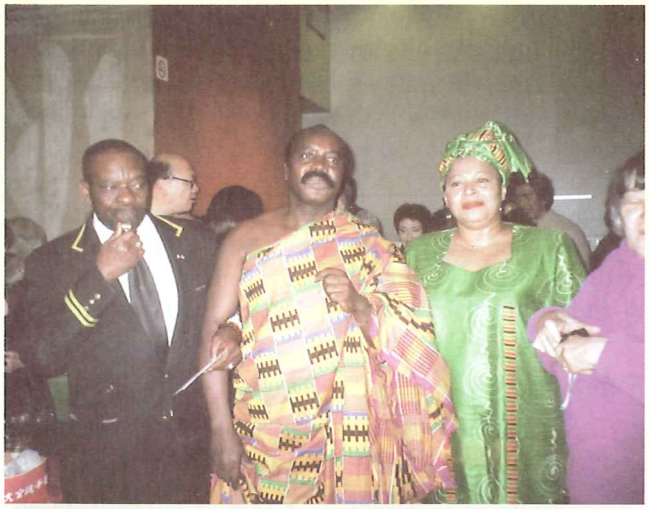


FIGURE 8.10 Sudanese kinship. The Sudanese system occurs most frequently in societies with substantial hierarchy and distinctions of class. It includes a separate term for each type of relative.

The Global and the Local: Transmigration and Kinship

Kinship relations are an important context in the migration of people across state borders, itself a significant dimension of globalization. The importance of kinship in this process is apparent in the criteria by which immigration rights and citizenship are granted in most nations of the world. In the United States, the priority of kinship and the cultural importance of bilateral kin relations are basic to contemporary immigration policy. In 1965, 1978, and 1990, new immigration laws abolished the discriminatory national origins quota system of the 1920s and emphasized family reunification. The current preference system, which gives highest priority to members of the nuclear family, indicates American cultural priorities: first preference is given to spouses and married and unmarried sons and daughters and their children. A lower preference is given to brothers and sisters, their spouses, and their children.

Immigration policies that make it easier for kin to immigrate as well as high levels of illegal immigration (often to join family members) have led to a large foreign-born population in the United States. In 1970, less than 5 percent of the U.S. population was foreign born. By 1994, that number had risen to almost 9 percent and by 2003, almost 12 percent (Larsen 2004).



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A festive gathering honoring an immigrant from West Africa who worked on the staff of a New York apartment building and sent money home to his family. Now, after many years of transmigration, he will return permanently to take a high official position in his native village.

transnationalism The pattern of close ties and frequent visits by immigrants to their home countries.

transmigrant Immigrants who maintain close relations with their home countries.

There are important differences between immigration today and immigration 100 years ago. In the past, most immigrants more or less severed ties with kin who stayed behind. Travel was difficult and very expensive. The only way most kin could keep in contact was by letters. Immigrants today live in a world where communication—by telephone, e-mail, and the Internet—is abundant, relatively simple, and inexpensive, and air travel is within the reach of the middle and working class. Thus, many immigrants, especially those from nearby areas such as the Caribbean, are able to retain much closer social and economic ties with their families and cultures in their homelands than previously (Hamid 1990). This pattern of close ties and frequent visits by immigrants to their home countries is called **transnationalism** (Glick-Schiller, Basch, and Szanton-Blanc 1992).

The term **transmigrant** has been coined to refer to immigrants who maintain close relations with their home countries (Glick-Schiller 1992). Transmigrants move culture, money, and information around the world rapidly, very often through kin networks. The substantial amounts of money migrants send to their families back home are critical in the economies of many nations, and by extension, in the global economy. According to a World Bank report, immigrants in the United States in 2001 sent $18 billion back to individuals in their home countries. Immigrants to Saudi Arabia, Germany, Belgium, and Switzerland also sent very large sums back home. Many national economies depend on these remittances: they account for 15 percent of the economy of Nicaragua, for example, and in Tajikistan, 54 percent of the economy depended on remittances in 2008 (Tavernise 2008a). Money sent home by migrants offers a safety net for those kin left behind both in their domestic lives and in the building of communities. Sadly, the decline in the global economy has its local effects: as employment declines everywhere, the situation of kin left at home also deteriorates.

Kinship ties have also long been an important route for migration, social networking, and earning a living in a new country. Through studying urban migrants, anthropologist Louise Lamphere (2001, in Stone) demonstrates the importance of kin networks in economic survival and success in the United States, and how this may change. Among Chinese immigrants to the United States, for example, pooling resources with kin has been an important factor in their business success. More than 90 percent of new immigrant businesses in the San Francisco Bay area

are family firms, initiated and built on family resources and kinship networks. As these firms grow, the family may depend on fictive kinship, incorporating people from the same village or those with the same last name but no known relationship (Wong 1988). Things are changing, however. The newer, successful Chinese immigrant professionals in the high-tech businesses and professions of Silicon Valley have become more like mainstream Americans in their social networks. The traditional importance of Chinese kinship networks—lineage, clan, and regional associations—are giving way in importance to professional organizations, social networks of friends, political organizations, and transnational social networks in their lives and careers (Wong 2006).

Kinship networks continue to be important for many immigrant groups; however, the Chinese in Silicon Valley also indicate that as immigrant situations change, the previous emphasis on kinship networks as a source of support to immigrants may give way, or be balanced by, other relationships.

Key Questions

1. What are some important connections between kinship and transmigration?
2. Discuss how your own kinship relations (or those of a recent immigrant or child of immigrants whom you know) function in both a global and a local context.

Summary

1. **What role does kinship play in modern industrial societies like the United States? Is nepotism an American value or is it a contradiction of American values?** Ideally, kinship in the United States should not grant favor or privilege, but nepotism does exist in many areas of life. In many societies, nepotism is expected as part of the almost universal cultural emphasis on kin helping and protecting each other.
2. **What are the functions of kinship systems?** Kinship systems are cultural creations that define and organize relatives by blood and marriage, classify different kinds of kin, provide continuity between generations, and define a group of people who can depend on one another for mutual aid.
3. **What is the most important difference between kinship in traditional societies compared to modern, industrial societies?** In traditional societies, kinship is the most important basis of social organization; in modern industrial societies, citizenship, social class, and common interests become more important than kinship in organizing social relationships.
4. **What is the role of descent in traditional societies?** In many societies, descent is the key factor in the formation of corporate social groups.
5. **What kinds of descent systems are found in different societies?** In societies with a unilineal rule of descent, mainly found among pastoral and horticultural societies, descent group membership is based on *either* the male or female line.
6. **What is the difference between a lineage and a clan and what sort of functions does each have?** A lineage is a group of kin whose members can trace their descent from a common ancestor. A clan is a group whose members believe they have a common ancestor but cannot trace the relationship genealogically. Lineages tend to have domestic functions, clans to have political and religious functions. Both lineages and clans are important in regulating marriage.
7. **What are the central dynamics that characterize patrilineal kinship systems?** In patrilineal systems, a man's children belong to his lineage, as do the children of his sons but not of his daughters. Patrilineality is often associated with patrilocality; husbands have strong control over wives and children, and the common economic interests of brothers is a major feature of the society.
8. **What are the central dynamics that characterize matrilineal kinship systems?** In matrilineal systems, which are normally matrilocal, a woman's children belong to her lineage, not that of their father. The mother's brother has authority over his sister's children, and relations between husband and wife are more fragile than in patrilineal societies.
9. **What is double descent and how does it function?** In systems of double descent, the individual belongs to both the patrilineage of the father and the matrilineage of the mother. Each group functions in different social contexts. The Yako of Nigeria have a system of double descent.
10. **Describe bilateral descent and give examples of the kinds of societies that are most likely to be bilateral.** In bilateral systems an individual is equally related to mother's and father's kin. This rule of descent results in the formation of kindreds, which are overlapping kinship networks, rather than a permanent group of kin. Bilateral kinship is found predominantly among foragers and in modern industrialized states.

11. **What are some of the principles used to categorize relatives in different systems of kinship terminology? Using these principles, give an example of the contrast between the American and North Indian kinship terminology.** Kinship terminologies group together or distinguish relatives according to various principles such as generation, relative age, lineality or collaterality, sex, consanguinity or affinity, bifurcation, and sex of the linking relative. Different societies may use all or some of these principles in classifying kin. For example, the American kinship terminology does not distinguish relative age nor does it distinguish the mother's from the father's side of the family, as is done in North India.

12. **What are the six major types of kinship classification systems and what do such systems reveal about a society?** The six major systems of kinship classification are the Hawaiian, Eskimo, Iroquois, Omaha, Crow, and Sudanese. Because kinship is a principal organizing structure in many societies and because using different kin terms reflects different behaviors expected toward different types of relatives, understanding kin systems helps anthropologists understand important aspects of social organization and behavior in different societies.

13. **What kind of roles does kinship play in immigration and transmigration? How might this change with changing circumstances?** In the past, kinship relationships played a central role in helping immigrants successfully adapt to their new homes. As the social status of immigrants changes, so the importance of kinship in adaptation may also change. For example, among Chinese immigrants in the San Francisco Bay area, kinship was historically very important in social relationships, but among contemporary Chinese professionals, occupational organizations and other non-kin networks play increasingly large roles.

Key Terms

affinal
ambilineal descent
bifurcation
bilateral descent
clan
cognatic descent
collateral kin
complementary opposition
consanguineal relatives
consanguinity
corporate descent groups
cross cousins
descent
descent group
double descent
exogamy
genitor
inheritance
kindred
kinship
kinship system
kinship terminology
lineage
lineal kin
matrilineage
matrilineal descent
nepotism
nonunilineal descent
parallel cousins
pater
patrilineage
patrilineal descent
phratry
segmentary lineage system
succession
totem
transmigrant
transnationalism
unilineal descent

Suggested Readings

Abu-Lugod, Lila. 1993. *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories.* Berkeley: University of California Press. The author uses women's stories to "write against culture," breathing life and complexity into anthropological categories of polygyny, cousin marriage, patrilineality, and other concepts used in studies of Middle Eastern kinship and family life.

Carsten, Janet. 2004. *After Kinship.* New York: Cambridge University Press. An analysis of the history and role of kinship studies in anthropology. Once central to the field, kinship studies became somewhat marginalized in the mid- and late-20th century, but they have once again become more important. Carsten contemplates the meaning of kinship in an era when individual and state choices as well as technologies shape our families.

Schneider, David M. 1968. *American Kinship: A Cultural Account.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall. The classic description of kinship in the United States and what it suggests about American culture.

Stone, Linda (Ed.). 2001. *New Directions in Anthropological Kinship.* Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield. A collection of essays by contemporary anthropologists looking at various dimensions of kinship, such as the role of kinship in the history of anthropology, biology and culture in kinship studies, kinship and new reproductive technologies, kinship and gender, new forms of family, and kinship in the politics of nations.