

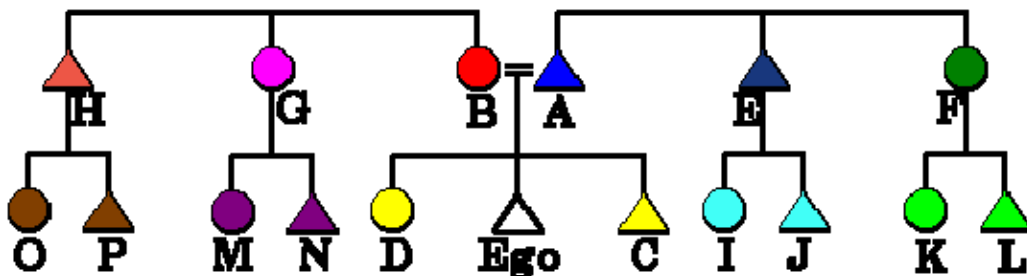
# SYSTEMATIC KINSHIP TERMINOLOGIES

Since kin terms are fundamentally arbitrary categories, different cultures can potentially group their relatives into a widely varying, indefinite number of classifications. Curiously, anthropologists have observed that almost every culture has constructed a system of terms that conforms to one of six widely occurring basic patterns. These are customarily designated as follows:

## Basic Kinship Classification Systems:

1. **Sudanese**
2. **Hawaiian**
3. **Eskimo**
4. **Iroquois**
5. **Omaha**
6. **Crow**

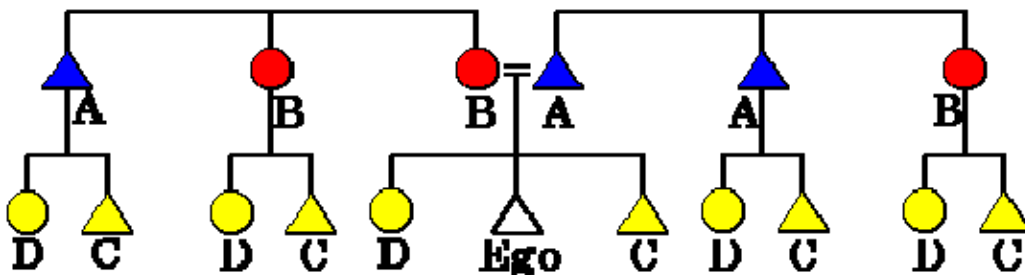
### Sudanese Kin Terms



The Sudanese system is completely descriptive and assigns a different kin term to each distinct relative, as indicated by separate letters and colours in the diagram above. Ego distinguishes between his father (A), his father's brother (E), and his mother's brother (H). There are potentially eight different cousin terms. Sudanese terminologies are difficult to relate to specific social institutions, since they include no categories per se. They are generally correlated with societies that have substantial class divisions. Examples of Sudanese systems include:

- **Latin kin terms**
- **Turkish kin terms**
- **Old English kin terms**

### Hawaiian Kin Terms

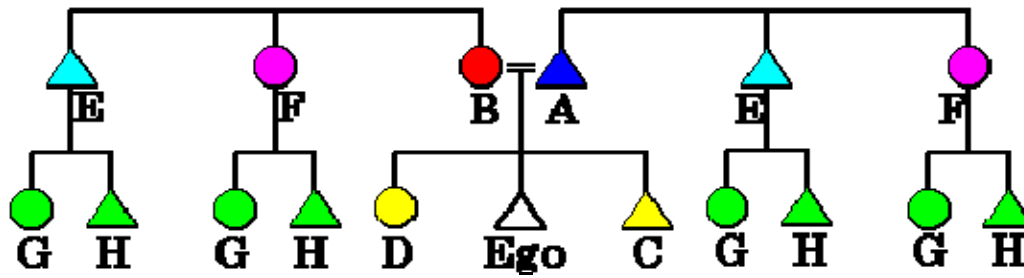


The Hawaiian system is the least descriptive and merges many different relatives into a small number of categories. Ego distinguishes between relatives only on the basis of sex and generation. Thus there is no uncle term; (mother's and father's brothers are included in the same category as father). All cousins are classified in the same group as brothers and sisters. Lewis Henry Morgan, a 19th century pioneer in kinship studies, surmised that the Hawaiian system resulted from a situation of unrestricted sexual access or "primitive promiscuity" in which children called all members of their parental generation father and mother because paternity was impossible to ascertain. Anthropologists now know that there is no history of such practices in any

of the cultures using this terminology and that people in these societies make behavioural, if not linguistic, distinctions between their actual parents and other individuals they may call "father" or "mother". Morgan's theses was based on an ethnocentric assumption that the term for relatives in ego's parents' generation had the same meanings that father and mother have in English. Hawaiian kinship semantics are now thought to be related to the presence and influence of **ambilineal descent systems**. The Hawaiian system can be illustrated by

- **actual Hawaiian terms** .

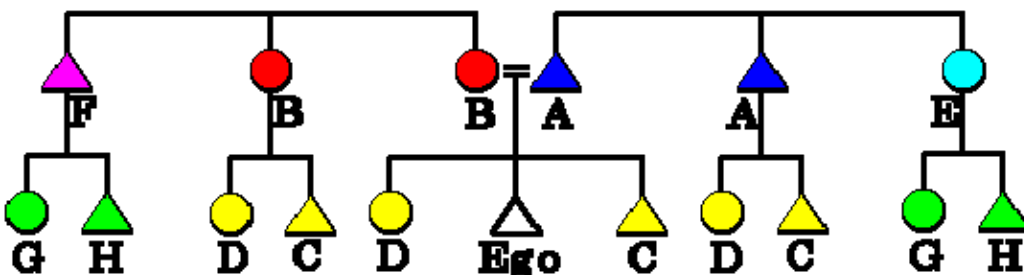
### Eskimo Kin Terms



The Eskimo system is marked by a bilateral emphasis - no distinction is made between patrilineal and matrilineal relatives - and by a recognition of differences in kinship distance - close relatives are distinguished from more distant ones. Another feature of Eskimo terminology is that nuclear family members are assigned unique labels that are not extended to any other relatives, whereas more distant relatives are grouped together on the basis of **collateral degree** . (This process is called collateral merging). Because of predominant marking of immediate family members, Eskimo terms usually occur in societies which place a strong emphasis on the nuclear family rather than on extended kin or larger kinship groups. Examples of Eskimo terminology include:

- **English kin terms**
- **Ju/'hoansi (!Kung San) kin terms**

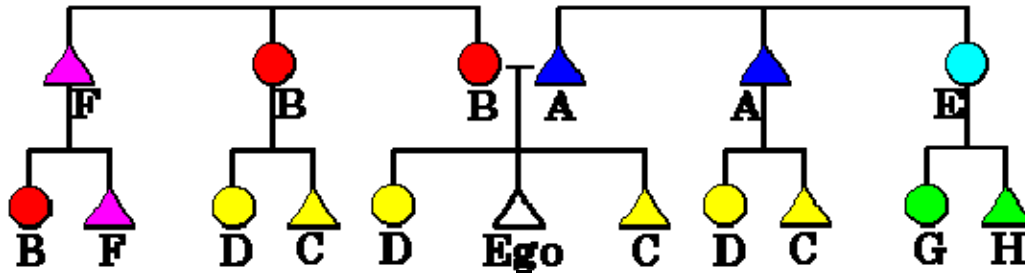
### Iroquois Kin Terms



The Iroquois system is based a principle of **bifurcate merging**. Ego distinguishes between relatives on his mother's side of the family and those on his father's side (bifurcation) and merges father with father's brother (A) and mother with mother's sister (B). Accordingly, father's brother's children and mother sister's children (parallel cousins) are merged with brother and sister (C and D). This terminology occurs in societies that are organized on the basis of **unilineal descent**, where distinctions between father's kin and mother's kin are critical. The Iroquois system can be illustrated by

- **Yanomamo kin terms**

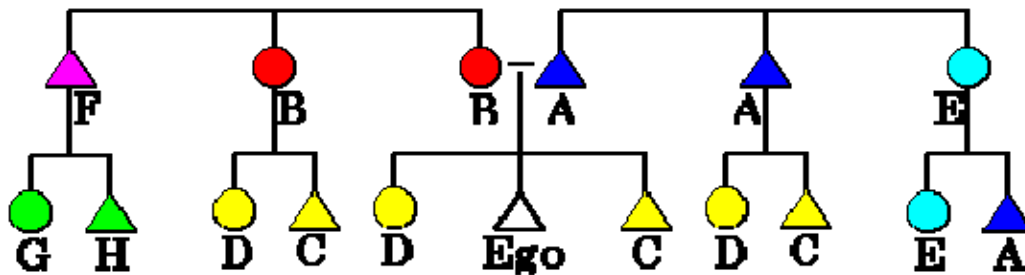
## Omaha Kin Terms



The Omaha system is similar to the Iroquois and is in fact a bifurcate merging system. Ego uses the same categorizations for father, father's brother and mother's brother that he would in an Iroquois terminology. However, there is a significant difference in cousin terminology. Parallel cousins are merged with siblings, however cross-cousin terms are quite peculiar and cut across generational divisions. Ego uses the same terms for his mother's brother's son as he does for his mother's brother (F) and the same term for mother's brother's daughter as for his mother (B). This lumping of generations is referred to as **skewing**. This pattern has the effect of stressing common membership of relatives in patrilineal lines; Ego's "mother" is defined as a female member of his mother's patrilineage, and Ego's "mother's brother" as a male member of his mother's patrilineage. As such Omaha terminologies are associated with societies that have a strong patrilineal emphasis in their social organization. Examples of Omaha terminologies include:

- [Dani kin terms](#)
- [Igbo kin terms](#)

## Crow Kin Terms



The Crow system is a mirror image of the Omaha. Ego generally employs a bifurcate merging pattern but applies a skewing rule to lump relatives within his father's matrilineage. Thus father's sister's son gets the same term as father (A) and father's sister's daughter, the same term as father's sister (E). This system is generally found in societies with strong matrilineal kinship emphases. The Crow system can be illustrated by

- [Akan kin terms](#)

**You have come to the end of the unit on kinship terms. Would you like to:**