

# KINSHIP

*Why is kinship so important in nonstate societies?*

*Can you explain why hunters and gatherers have kinship classification systems similar to those of industrialized societies?*

*What are some of the functions of different kinds of kinship systems?*

*How can people manipulate kinship rules to serve their own interests?*

*In what ways do kinship terminologies reflect other aspects of a culture?*



TIES OF KINSHIP, THROUGH DESCENT AND MARRIAGE, ARE IMPORTANT IN ALL SOCIETIES, THOUGH IN COMPLEX SOCIETIES THESE TIES AS THE BASIS OF AN INDIVIDUAL'S SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES COMPETE WITH OTHER TIES, SUCH AS CITIZENSHIP. AMONG THE MANY KINSHIP OBLIGATIONS IN ALL SOCIETIES IS PARTICIPATION IN IMPORTANT LIFE CYCLE CEREMONIES, SUCH AS THIS MARRIAGE TAKING PLACE IN KOREA.

In societies traditionally studied by anthropologists, kinship is the most important social bond. Although kinship systems are themselves embedded in economic systems, once kinship systems are established in a society, they have an important independent influence on behavior. Kinship is the basis of group formation, relationships between individuals are governed mainly by kinship norms, and the extension of kinship ties is the main way of ally-ing groups to one another and incorporating strangers into a group. The centrality of kinship in determining the rights and responsibilities of people in most of the world's cultures contrasts with Western societies, in which other principles of social organization, such as work, citizenship, and common economic and political interests, are also important as the basis for group formation and for providing the framework within which individual rights and obligations are articulated.

This does not mean that kinship is insignificant in modern industrialized societies. After all, 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 Thanksgiving is generally thought of as a family holiday among those who celebrate it. 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 is not ideally regarded as the basis of occupational choice, it does play a significant role in some important aspects of American life.

Anthropologist Jack Weatherford makes a persuasive case for the importance of kinship ties in American politics (1981). Among the most important names in United States political history are the Adams, Cabot, Lodge, and Kennedy families of Massachusetts, the Roosevelts of New York, the Gores of Tennessee, and the Bush family from Texas. Some might claim that these family ties in politics are an exception rather than a dominant cultural pattern, but the many examples Weatherford notes, as well as the more

familiar examples of the sons and daughters of movie stars who themselves become movie stars, do make a plausible claim for the importance of kinship in American society.

## KINSHIP: RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH BLOOD AND MARRIAGE

**Kinship** includes relationships through blood (**consanguineal**) and relationships through marriage (**affinal**). In every society, the formation of groups and the regulation of behavior depend to some extent on socially recognized ties of kinship. 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 used to classify different kin (**kinship terminology**). Because there is a relationship between the formation of kinship groups, the development of kinship ideology, the behavior of different kin toward one another, and the kinship terminology of a society, anthropologists refer to kinship as a system.

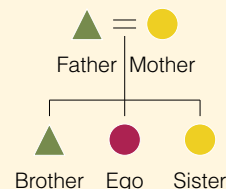
Although a kinship system always rests on some kind of biological relationship, kinship systems are cultural phenomena. The ways in which a society classifies kin are cultural, and they may or may not be based on a scientifically accurate assessment of biological ties. The term for father, for example, may refer to the actual biological father (**genitor**) of a child, or it may refer to a man who takes on the 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 polyandrous societies, such as the Toda of India, 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, there is a wide variety of ways in which both consanguineal and affinal relatives are classified in different societies. There are also differences in the kinds of social groups formed by kinship and the ways in which kin are expected to behave toward one another.

**K**inship diagrams are more convenient than verbal explanations and allow us to see immediately how different kinship statuses are linked. In order to make a kinship diagram precise and unambiguous, all relationships in the diagram are viewed from the perspective of one status, labeled **Ego**. Terms of reference rather than terms of address are used—that is, terms we would use in talking about a relative rather than talk-

ing to one. In English, for example, we would refer to our mother but might address her as Mom. The symbols used in kinship diagrams are these:

▲ Male	= Marital (affinal) tie
● Female	— Blood (consanguineal) tie

Using these symbols, and English terminology, a kinship diagram of the nuclear family looks like this:



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. Furthermore, 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.

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 groups of consanguineal kin 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 kinship systems with bilateral descent, nonoverlapping kinship groups are not formed. Bilateral kinship systems are found in few societies throughout the world, although they are basic to Western culture.

## UNILINEAL DESCENT

The frequency of unilineal descent in the world's cultures is caused by two major advantages: Unilineal rules result in the formation of nonoverlapping descent groups that can perpetuate themselves over time even though their membership changes (as modern corporations can). Corporate descent groups are permanent units and 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). Furthermore, such rules provide unambiguous group membership for everyone in the society. In short, where descent is traced through only one line, group membership is easily and clearly defined. By knowing the descent group to which he or she belongs and the descent group of others, a person can be sure of his or her rights of ownership, social duties, and social roles. He or she can

also easily relate to a large number of known and unknown people in the society.

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, 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 situations and conditions change, the rules of kinship, like other cultural ideals, are bent and manipulated so that a group may be successful in its environment. 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.

A number of explanations have been given by anthropologists in their attempts to understand the evolution of unilineal descent groups. The common interests that give people a reason to join together and define themselves as a collective entity justified by kin relations are

G L O B A L I Z A T I O N

## KINSHIP AND TRANSMIGRATION

**M**igration of people across national borders is 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, for example, 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, with a lower preference to brothers and sisters, their spouses, and their children (Harnik 1993). Kinship is also important in the ways in which kin continue ties with

their countries of origin through remittances, phone calls, and such frequent going back and forth that a new term, *transmigrant*, has been coined to indicate these regular connections (Glick-Schiller 1992). The significance of transnational kin relations today means that immigration is often not a traumatic uprooting and that culture is being redefined less in terms of territory than in terms of a portable personal possession that one can carry back and forth across national boundaries.

very diverse. These interests may be economic, such as land or cattle or gardens; they may also be political or religious or 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, as we will see later in the case of inheritance and succession in a Korean village.

### TYPES OF UNILINEAL DESCENT GROUPS

A **lineage** is a group of kin whose members trace descent from a common ancestor and who can demonstrate those genealogical links among themselves. 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 size, 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.

Related lineages may form **clans**, whose presumed common 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.

Clans and lineages have different functions in different societies. The lineage is often a local residential or domestic group, and its members therefore 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 exogamous. The prohibition on 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) says 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 confounded. 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.

### 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 9.1). 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.

### THE NUER: A PATRILINEAL SOCIETY

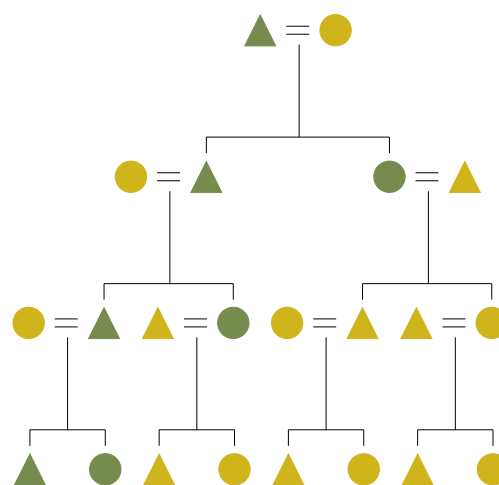
The Nuer, a pastoral people who live in the Sudan in East Africa, are a patrilineal society. Among the Nuer, all rights, privileges, obligations, and interpersonal relationships are regulated by kinship; one is either a kinsman or an enemy. Membership in a patrilineal descent group is the most significant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



determines political and judicial obligations, such as making alliances in feuds and warfare. The patrilineage has important political functions among the Nuer. Lineage membership may spread over several villages and thus help create alliances between otherwise independent villages that contain members of several different lineages. Related lineages form still larger groups, or clans. Clans are viewed as composed of lineages, not of individuals. Each Nuer clan has its members spread out over many 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, kinship-based alliances are an important mechanism for keeping the peace, in view of the Nuer belief that kin should not fight with one another (Evans-Pritchard [1940] 1968).

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 binding the wife and children to the husband. Patrilineal systems most often have patrilocal rules of residence, so a wife may find herself living among strangers (this would not be true in societies where cousin marriage is practiced), which tends to undermine female solidarity and support. Because marriage in patrilineal systems is generally surrounded by strict sanctions and tends to be more stable than it is in matrilineal systems, anthropologists have often neglected the sources of conflict that are part of the realities of life in all societies; some of these conflicts derive from the discontent of women, others from the relationships between husband and wife or mother and sons.

Women's lives in patrilineal systems are more complex than has generally been portrayed, even by anthropologists. Some new work fo-



**FIGURE 9.1**

MEMBERSHIP IN 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 GREEN), AS ARE THE CHILDREN OF SONS, BUT NOT OF DAUGHTERS.

cuses on developing a richer understanding of women's participation in families and larger kin groups dominated by men. Lila Abu-Lughod's analysis of women's roles in the Arab world is a good example of this (1993). Women in the Arab world have often been portrayed in terms of the 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 so that they do not cast shame on their families. According to Abu-Lughod, these generalizations give a false sense of "coherence, homogeneity, and timelessness" to these cultures. They erase much of the reality of life as it is lived, which involves "contradictions, conflicts of interests, doubts, and arguments" as well as changing motivations and historical circumstances. Abu-Lughod challenges these static pictures by "writing against culture" as she recounts and analyzes 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, women who rebel against the norms of their society in small and sometimes effective ways.

The importance of family stories as a way of challenging a static picture of societies dominated by rigid kinship rules is illustrated in the

following box about a conflict over inheritance in a family in a Korean village.

### 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). Whereas in patrilineal societies, the most

**T**he classic anthropological picture of kinship in East Asian villages has been dominated by a focus on the rules of patrilineality, primogeniture (the eldest son inherits all his father's property), seniority, Confucian ethics, and patriarchal authority. This emphasis on rules leaves little room for understanding the realities of family dynamics as they adapt to changing circumstances.

Kinship rules in Korea, as elsewhere, are manipulated by individual family members for their own advantage. Rules of succession to family headship and inheritance are contested as family members try to ensure that their contributions to the family are acknowledged and rewarded in a material way. Occasions on which family property is divided are particularly important as contests in which the balance of credits and debts among family members is reckoned.

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, which includes his parents' house and more than half their land. In return, the heir is perpetually obligated to care for his elderly parents and worship them as ancestors after their deaths. The

### RULES AND REALITIES: CONFLICT OVER INHERITANCE IN A KOREAN VILLAGE

ancestor worship includes a man's parents and the three preceding generations of lineal ancestors.

However, the realities of contemporary life make it necessary to circumvent these rules in many cases. Most Pine Tree families are so poor that there is not enough property to divide so that any one child will significantly benefit. If the family property has 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. Also, the important Korean value of *chong*, or compassionate generosity, requires elder sons to provide for their younger siblings by contributing to their marriages, education, and living expenses. Any elder son who does not so provide for his younger siblings is highly disapproved of by the community. Finally, in contemporary Korea, an important factor complicating the rule of primogeniture is the practice of a family spending some of its resources on educating one of its

sons in the city. This is an enormous expense for a poor or even well-to-do peasant family.

The poverty of many Korean villages and the pull of industrialization in Korean cities have caused many villagers to migrate, so that receiving an education in the city has become a respected alternative to remaining on the farm. Education is highly valued in Korea, for both its traditional importance in Confucian ethics and its pragmatic value; it is a source of great pride to a Korean family to have a highly educated son. However, the high cost of education can be a source of conflict because the money spent on one child's education may be resented by his siblings, who experience his success as having taken place at their expense. This may be exacerbated by a feeling that favoritism plays a role in which son is chosen to be educated. 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 legally are entitled to an equal share of a family's

important source of male authority and control in the kinship system derives from a man's positions of father and husband, in matrilineal societies the brother of a woman (the mother's brother) rather than her husband is the most important male position in the kinship system. 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, and there are many areas of rights and

responsibilities that belong not to him but to the woman's brother. Children belong to the mother's descent group, not the father's. Thus, the membership of a matrilineal descent group 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).

Matrilineal systems tend to be correlated with a matrilineal rule of residence: A man goes to live

property. In Pine Tree, however, a daughter's right to family property is considered terminated if her family gave her extensive gifts of cash, furniture, cloth, and jewelry on her marriage. Although a woman who has received such gifts is discouraged from claiming her legal share of family property, many women do make such claims. Contrary to stereotypes, Korean village women are not unassertive. They often participate in the rituals of ancestor worship (formally, a male prerogative), which gives them a strong basis for claiming family property. These claims may also lead to conflict between brothers and sisters.

A case study of one family in Pine Tree illustrates many of these conflicting claims. In this family, Sungjo, a frail child who had one brother and two sisters, was his mother's favorite. Because of Sungjo's frailty, he would not be much use as a farmer anyway, and his mother was determined to have him educated in the city. Through her persistence, 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 woods in the nearby mountains.

After Sungjo's graduation from the university, he was employed by 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 early deaths, their children attributed it to the sacrifices they had made for Sungjo's education. The elder brother, Sungman, had no sons, and 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 8 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

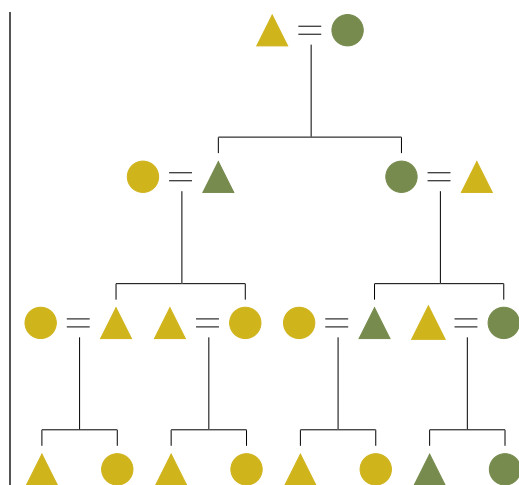
of her father's lineage, but that of her husband, and she had neither legal nor cultural support for her claims. Furthermore, Sungjo's eldest sister, who stood to gain more from Sungjo's management of the property than that of her niece, allied with Sungjo to wrest the property from Sungman's daughter.

As stated in the opening of this chapter, one of the most important functions of kinship rules is to smooth the transition of office and property between generations. The rules are important, but they are not everything. As Sungjo's family history indicates, cultural rules are broken to satisfy the demands of changing social circumstances. Conflicting claims based on specific circumstances and individual experiences compete with shared cultural rules and values and play decisive roles in family succession and inheritance. However, even as kinship behavior departs from kinship rules, the rules themselves and the kinship categories on which they are based change much more slowly.

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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.



**FIGURE 9.2**

MEMBERSHIP IN 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 MOTHERS' DESCENT GROUP, AS ARE THE CHILDREN OF DAUGHTERS, BUT NOT THE CHILDREN OF SONS.

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 inclusion of a husband in the household is less important in a matrilineal system than in a patrilineal one, and marriages in matrilineal societies tend to be less stable than those in other systems. As we saw among the Nayar of India, 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 where 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 (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.

### THE HOPI: A MATRILINEAL SOCIETY

The Hopi, a Pueblo group in the American Southwest, are a matrilineal society. The matrilineage is conceived of as timeless, stretching backward to the beginnings of the Hopi people and continuing into the future. Both male and female members of the lineage consider their mother's house their home, but men move out to live with their wives after marriage. They return to this home for many ritual and ceremonial occasions, however, and also in the case of separation or divorce. The relationship of a man with his father's lineage and household is affectionate, involving some economic and ritual obligations but little direct cooperation or authority.

The Hopi household revolves around a central and continuing core of women. The mother-daughter relationship is an exceedingly close one, based on blood ties, common activities, and lifelong residence together. A mother is responsible for the economic and ritual training of her daughters. The daughter behaves with respect, obedience, and affection to her mother and normally lives with her mother and mother's

sisters after marriage. A mother also has a close relationship with her son, although he moves to his wife's home after marriage. A son belongs to his mother's lineage and keeps much of his personal and ritual property in her home. A son shows respect for his mother as head of the household and consults her on all important decisions.

The strongest and most permanent tie in Hopi society is between sisters. The foundation of the household group is the relation of sisters to one another and to their mother. The children of sisters are raised together; if one sister dies, another looks after her children. Sisters cooperate in all domestic tasks. There are usually few quarrels, and when they occur, they are settled by the mother's brother or their own brothers.

As in all matrilineal societies, a man's relationship to his sister's sons is very important. As head of his sister's lineage and household, a Hopi man is in a position of authority and control. He is the chief disciplinarian and has the primary responsibility for transmitting the ritual heritage of the lineage and clan, which occupies the highest place in Hopi values. A man usually selects his most capable nephew as his successor and trains him in the duties of whatever ceremonial position he may hold; this authority may lead boys to fear their maternal uncles. A woman's brother plays an important role in his nieces' and nephews' lives and is consulted in the choice of a spouse. He instructs his nephews in the proper behavior toward his new relatives and formally welcomes his niece's husband into the household.

As in other matrilineal descent systems, Hopi husbands who come into the household have important economic functions but do not participate in the matrilineage ritual. Indeed, husbands may be considered peripheral in their wives' households, having not only divided residences but divided loyalties. A Hopi father's obligations to his sons are primarily economic. He prepares them to make a living by teaching them to farm and herd sheep and may become partners with a son in herding. At a son's marriage, a father often presents him with a portion of the flock and small piece of land. The eco-



THE HOPi FAMILY IS MATRILINEAL AND REVOLVES AROUND A CORE OF WOMEN. A HUSBAND MOVES TO HIS WIFE'S HOUSEHOLD, IN WHICH HE HAS IMPORTANT ECONOMIC RESPONSIBILITIES BUT FEW RITUAL OBLIGATIONS. THE MOST IMPORTANT MALE ROLE IN HOPi SOCIETY, AS IN OTHER MATRILINEAL SOCIETIES, IS THE RELATION OF A WOMAN'S BROTHER TO HER SON, AND A MAN RETAINS AUTHORITY AND LEADERSHIP IN HIS NATAL HOUSEHOLD EVEN AFTER HE MARRIES.

nomic support a son receives from his father is returned in the father's old age, when he is supported by his sons. The son who supports his father and takes responsibility for his father's funeral rites receives a larger share of his father's personal property than his (son's) brothers. Whereas a boy's relationship with his maternal uncle is characterized by reserve, respect, and even fear, a boy's relations with his father is more affectionate and involves little discipline. A Hopi man's relationship with his daughter is also generally affectionate but not close, and he has few specific duties in regard to her upbringing.

In addition to matrilineages, the Hopi also have matrilineal clans that extend over many different villages. A Hopi man must not marry within his own clan or the clan of his father or his mother's father. Through marriage a Hopi man acquires a wide range of relatives in addition to those resulting from his membership in his mother's clan. A Hopi has obligations to the clan of the father as well as to that of the mother and also to the clans of the person designated as the ceremonial father. Kinship terms are extended to all these people, leading to a vast number of potential sibling relationships and the lateral integration of a great number of separate lineages and clans. This extension of Hopi kinship relates a Hopi in some way to almost everyone in the village, in other villages, and even to people in other Pueblo groups who have similar clans. Whereas the lineage group is particularly important to women, these larger clan groups are the arena of male activities. Here men play important political and religious roles, in contrast to the marginal positions they have in domestic life. The Hopi also extend kinship ideology to the world of nature. The sun is called "father," and the earth and corn are called "mother." Natural phenomena such as plant and animal species that serve as clan names are also referred to by kinship terminology, such as "mother" or "mother's brother" (Eggan 1950).

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### DOUBLE DESCENT: THE YAKO OF NIGERIA

When descent is traced through a combination of matrilineal and patrilineal principles, a system of **double descent** exists. In societies with double-descent systems, which occur among only 5% of the world's cultures, a person belongs both to the patrilineal group of the father and the matrilineal group of the mother. Thus, matrilineal and patrilineal descent both operate as principles of affiliation, but the descent groups formed operate in different areas of life.

The Yako of Nigeria have a system of double descent (Forde 1967). Cooperation in daily domestic life is strongest among patrilineally related kinsmen who live with or near one another.

These men jointly control and farm plots of land, and membership in the patrilineal clan is the source of rights over farmland and forest products. One obligation of the patrilineal clan is to provide food at funerals. Inheritance of membership in the men's associations and the right to fruit trees are also transmitted in the male line. The arbitration of disputes is in the hands of senior patrilineal members, and cooperation in ritual and succession to some religious offices are also derived from clan membership.

Matrilineal bonds and clan membership are also important in Yako society, despite the fact that matrilineal 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 matrilineal spirits, whose priests are ritually given the qualities of women.

Despite their isolation from one another by the rule of patrilocal residence, matrilineal relatives have specific mutual obligations. Rights in the transfer of accumulated wealth, but not land, belong to the matrilineal kinship group. The members of a matrilineal clan supervise a funeral and arrange for the disposal of the dead person's personal property. 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. Matrilineal clans are responsible for the debts of their kin, for mak-

ing 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, by which people are bound to one another and through which the continuity of the society is ensured.

### NONUNILINEAL KINSHIP SYSTEMS

About 40% of the world's societies are nonunilineal, or bilateral, including the United States. In systems of bilateral descent (also called **cognatic** systems), a person is considered to be related equally to other kin through both the mother's and the father's sides, although in the United States the patrilineal principle is dominant in the handing down of family names. In bilateral kinship systems, exclusive and permanent kinship groups are not formed. Rather, kin relations extend along lines established by links through both males and females. Bilateral kinship systems emphasize the importance of close biological relatives, as opposed to an expanded culturally defined kin universe.

In bilateral systems, kin networks are important, however. The people linked by bilateral kin networks are called a **kindred**. Keep in mind that a kindred is not a group but rather a network with Ego at the center. With the exception of brothers and sisters, every person's kindred is different from every other person's. Kindreds are actually overlapping categories of kin (which is why the term *kin network* rather than *group* is used), so they cannot be the basis for the formation of corporate groups. This is the major functional weakness of the kindred as a cooperative collectivity. Because it is not a group but rather an Ego-centered network, it cannot own land or have continuity over time, but bilateral systems have great flexibility. An individual can mobilize a number of relatives from either the father's or the mother's side (or both), depending on the enterprise being undertaken. Bilateral kinship systems appear to be particularly adaptive in societies where mobil-

ity and independence are important, and they predominate among hunters and gatherers and in modern industrial societies.

### 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. As we see later in this chapter, some kinship systems, such as the Eskimo system, have a small number of kinship terms, whereas other systems, such as the Sudanese, have a different term for almost every relative.

The ways in which kin are classified are associated with the roles they play in society. For example, if Ego refers to his father and his father's brothers by the same term, the roles he plays in relation to all of these relatives tend to be similar. By the same token, if Ego's father and father's brothers are referred to by different terms, it is expected that Ego will act differently toward each of them and that they will act differently toward him. Furthermore, kinship systems have both an ideal and a real component: Kinship ties include expectations of certain kinds of behavior, but actual behavior is modified by individual personality differences and special circumstances.

### PRINCIPLES FOR CLASSIFYING KIN

Societies differ in the categories of relatives they distinguish and the principles by which kin are classified. The seven important principles for separating and grouping together different categories of kin are the following:

*Generation.* This principle distinguishes ascending and descending generations from Ego. For example, in English we call relatives in the

parental generation by such terms as *aunt* or *uncle*, and kin in the descending generation *nephew* or *niece*.

*Relative age.* In a kinship system that uses this principle, there are kinship terms for one's older brother and one's younger brother, for example. English kinship terminology does not recognize this principle.

*Lineality versus collaterality.* Lineal kin are related in a single line, such as grandfather–father–son. **Collateral kin** are descended from a common ancestor with Ego but are not Ego's direct ascendants or descendants. For example, our brothers and sisters (siblings) and our cousins are collateral kin: We and they are descended from the same ancestors, but they are not in our direct ascendant or descendant line. In many societies, collaterality is not distinguished in the kinship terminology, so that Ego refers to both his father and father's brother as father. Both the mother and her sisters may similarly be called mother. In these systems, parallel cousins (but not cross cousins) may also be called by the same terms as those for brothers and sisters.

*Gender.* 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 equally applied to the brother of our father or mother, and to the husbands of our father's or mother's sisters.

*Sex of linking relative.* In societies where distinguishing collateral relatives is an important principle of kinship classification, the sex of the linking relative may be important in the kinship terminology. For example, parallel cousins may be distinguished from cross cousins and may further be distinguished by the gender of the linking relative (for example, matrilineal as opposed to patrilineal cross or parallel cousins). This is particularly important where Ego is pro-

hibited from marrying a parallel cousin but may, or even must, marry a cross cousin.

*Side of the family.* Under this principle, called **bifurcation**, kin terms distinguish between relatives from the mother's side of the family and those from the father's side. An example would be societies where the mother's brother is referred to differently from the father's brother. This principle is not used in English kinship terminology.

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. The following ethnography illustrates how the differences in kinship classification systems between North America and North India reflect many other cultural patterns in those two societies.

## TYPES OF KINSHIP TERMINOLOGIES

Systems of kinship terminology reflect the kinds of kin groups that are most important in a society. Anthropologists have identified six systems of kinship terminology: Hawaiian, Eskimo, Iroquois, Omaha, Crow, and Sudanese.

### HAWAIIAN

As its name suggests, this system is found in Polynesia. It is rather simple in that it uses the least number of kinship terms. The Hawaiian system emphasizes the distinctions between generations and reflects the equality between the mother 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 (Figure 9.3). This system correlates with ambilineality and ambilocality, which means that a person may choose which descent group he or she wishes to belong to and will live with after marriage. By using the same terms for parents and their siblings, a closeness is established with a large number of relatives in the ascending generation, allowing a wide choice for Ego in deciding which group to affiliate and live with.

### ESKIMO

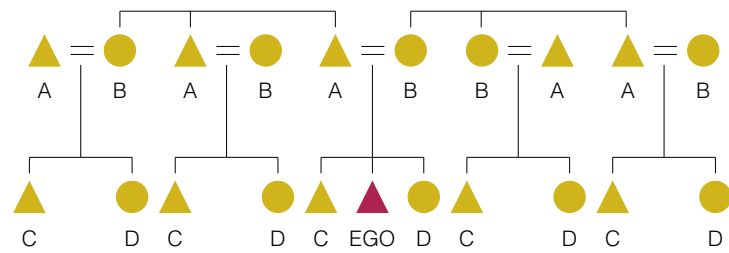
The Eskimo terminology is correlated with bilateral descent. It is found among hunting-and-gathering peoples in the United States. The Eskimo system emphasizes the nuclear family by using terms for its members (mother, father, sister, brother, daughter, son) that are not used for any other kin. Outside 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 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 (Figure 9.4).

### 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) (Figure 9.5).

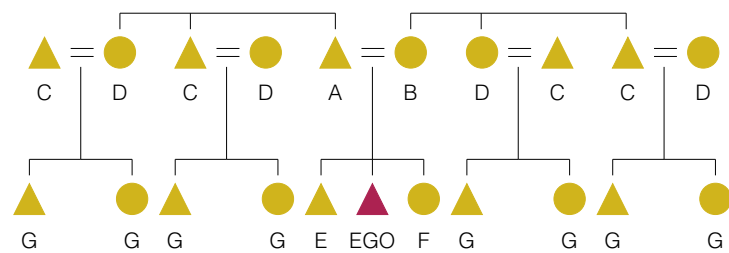
### OMAHA

The Omaha system is found among patrilineal peoples, including the Native American group of that name. In this system, the same term is



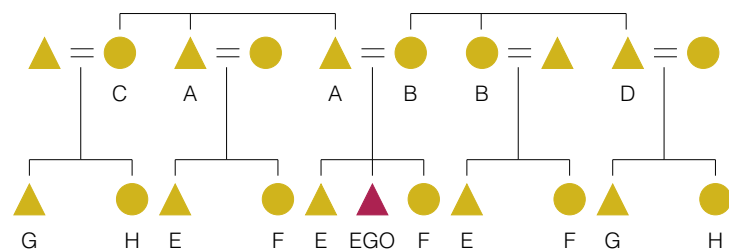
**FIGURE 9.3**

HAWAIIAN KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY. SYMBOLS WITH THE SAME LETTERS UNDERNEATH ARE REFERRED TO IN THE SAME WAY BY EGO.



**FIGURE 9.4**

ESKIMO KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY.



**FIGURE 9.5**

IROQUOIS KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY.

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 a separate term. 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 (Figure 9.6). 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 patrilineal and the mother's patrilineal groups reflect the different position of Ego in relation to these kin. Generational dif-

ferences 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 9.7 on p. 198). 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.

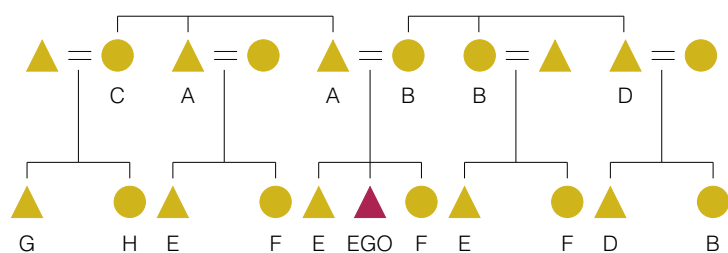


FIGURE 9.6

OMAHA KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY.

## KINSHIP CLASSIFICATION SYSTEMS IN ACTION: A COMPARISON BETWEEN NORTH AMERICA AND NORTH INDIA

As an anthropologist, I (Nanda) have had the traditional professional interest in kinship classification systems. As an American woman married to a man from North India, however, I have had a more personal interest in understanding how the principles of classification in my culture differ from those of my husband's culture.



In order for me to behave properly with the members of my husband's family, I had to learn each of the North Indian kinship terms and the expected behaviors associated with them. At first, I made a lot of mistakes but as I continued to meet new family members I learned to ask the relevant questions about their relationship so that I could act appropriately. My anthropological experience in making and interpreting kinship diagrams was very helpful in this respect.

As the kinship diagrams of India and the United States indicate, one immediately apparent difference between the North American and the North Indian kinship

*Kinship Classification Systems in Action: A Comparison Between North America and North India (continued)*

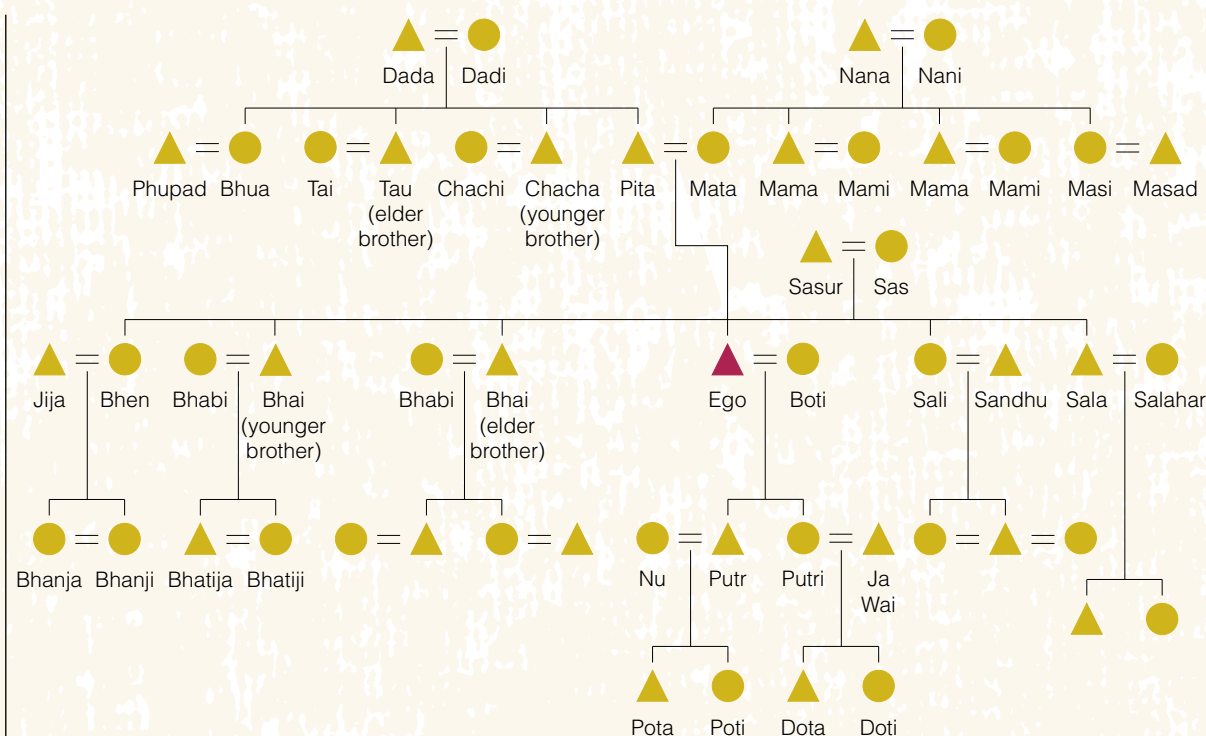
classification systems is the number of terms: In North India there are forty-five terms, whereas in the United States there are only twenty-two. This is because the North Indian system distinguishes several kinds of kin that North Americans group together. Although my husband also had to learn a new kinship classification system, it was easier for him because of the smaller number of categories of relatives and the correspondingly greater flexibility in behavior that is acceptable in North America. For me, learning the many different North Indian kinship terms and the many corresponding rules of kinship behavior seemed quite a burden. But when I understood the cultural patterns on which these terms and rules of behavior were based, they made more sense

to me and I could more easily fit new relatives into the system and act accordingly.

Many of the North Indian cultural patterns that underlie kinship terminology are based on the importance of the patrilineal and patrilocal joint family (see p. 175): the importance of the male principle in inheritance and seniority; 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: the values of hierarchy and the

importance of the group. These values contrast with the Western values of equality, individualism, and the nuclear family, which are expressed in North American kinship terminology. Space limitations prohibit examining all of the ways in which the contrasts between the Indian cultural values of hierarchy and group orientation and North American values of equality and individualism are reflected in the kinship classification systems, but several examples will make these clear.

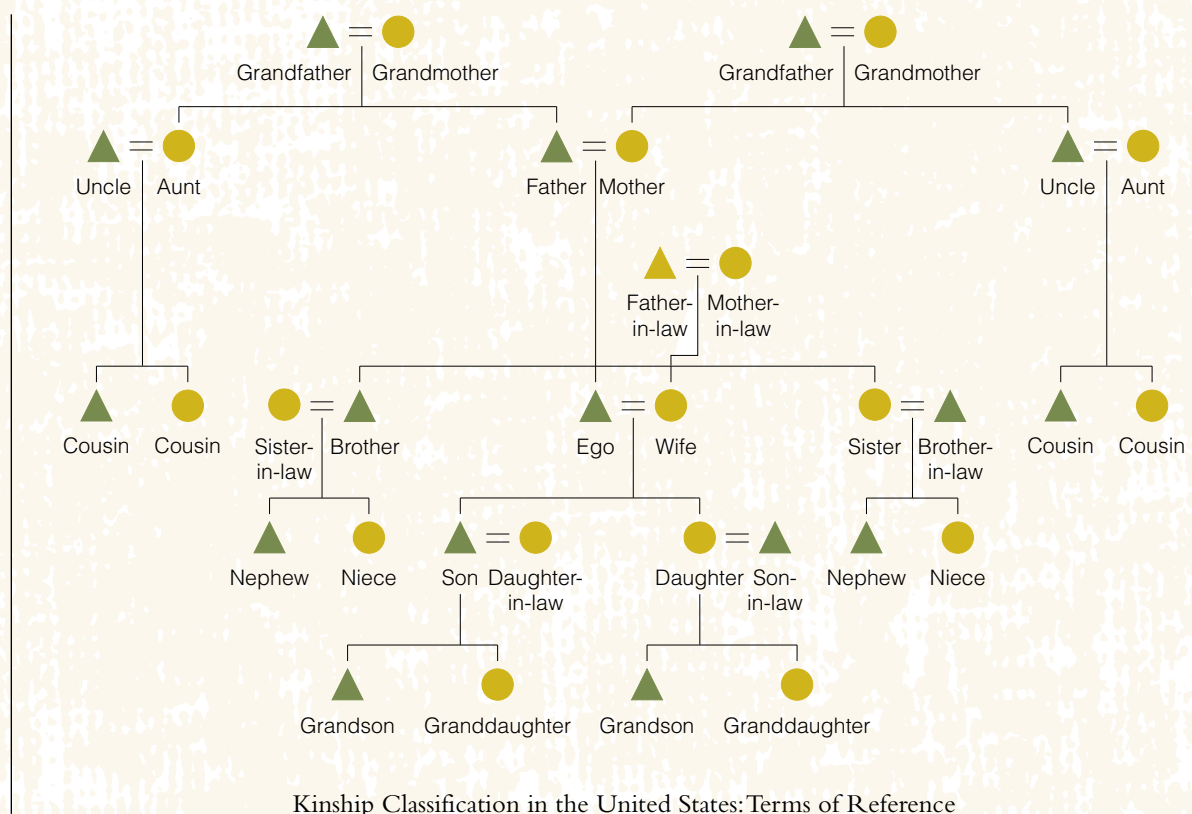
The principle of relative age, which is an aspect of hierarchy, is critical in the Indian kinship system but absent in North America. Thus, my husband uses different terms to refer to his father's elder brother (*tau*) and his father's younger brother



**Kinship Classification in North India: Terms of Reference**

*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 this 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 six terms to the thirty-nine used by male EGO.

*Kinship Classification Systems in Action: A Comparison Between North America and North India (continued)*



(*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 importance of respect attached to seniority. My relationship with my husband's brothers and their wives is also regulated by this principle of seniority. I was instructed that my husband's elder brother is my *jait* and his wife is my *jaitani*, and that 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 back 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. Because Indians understand that Americans are generally friendly people who do not recognize these status differences in their own culture, my husband's relatives were very tolerant of my sometimes forgetful lack of deference. For an Indian woman, however, such lapses would be much more serious and her relations with her husband's elder and younger brothers would be much more strictly differentiated. Indeed, were I an Indian woman, out of respect for the principle of hierarchy, I would probably have to cover my hair, if not my face, in

the presence of both my father-in-law  
and my 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 in relation to Ego. This principle of 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 that is associated more with the male side of the family and the more open show of affection permitted with the maternal side of the family.



*Kinship Classification Systems in Action: A Comparison Between North America and North India (continued)*

In India, social interaction with one's mother's parents is very different from that with one's father's parents because ideally the Indian household is based on the patrilineal joint family composed of a man, his brothers, his father, and his sons. Thus, a son interacts with his father's parents on an everyday basis, whereas his mother's parents live some distance away. Visiting his mother's parents is more like an exciting pleasure trip, and increased fondness and absence of conflict seem to come with distance. In addition, because the parents are expected to give gifts to their daughter and her husband when she visits their home, they also extend this gift-giving to her children, who thus have an additional reason to look forward to such visits.

The patrilineal joint family structure also accounts for another terminological difference between India and the United States: their grouping together terminologically kin that Americans distinguish. In order to highlight the importance of the nuclear family in the United States, the American kinship system distinguishes between siblings (brothers and sisters) and cousins, both of which are collateral relations. But in India this distinction is not made. There is no word for cousin, and what Americans call cousins Indians refer to by the terms for brother and sister.

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 Ego'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 further. When my husband's sister's husband's sister's husband first visited our home, we treated him with the extra respect due to a man who had taken a "daughter" from our family (the "daughter" referring to both my husband's sister and her husband's sister).

A last example of the importance of kinship terminology in regulating behavior involves the ritual role that different relatives take in life-cycle ceremonies, a form of behavior familiar in the United States. For example, in the United States, a woman's father often accompanies her down the aisle when she marries. In India, the marriage ceremony is much more complex. Each part of the ceremony involves a person in a specific kinship relation to the groom or bride, reflecting all of the important principles by which kin are classified there: relative age, lineality, collaterality, bifurcation, gender, generation, consanguinity, and affinity. Thus, when my husband's sister's son got married, my husband, as the brother of the groom's mother, tied the turban on the groom. However, when my husband's sister's daughter marries, he, as the mother's brother, will give her the ivory and red bangle bracelets that she will wear for a year and the special piece of red cloth that is used in the marriage ceremony. These rituals are concrete symbolic expressions of the continuing warmth and support a girl can expect to find among her mother's male kin, a very important expectation in a culture where a woman is otherwise separated from her own family and incorporated into her

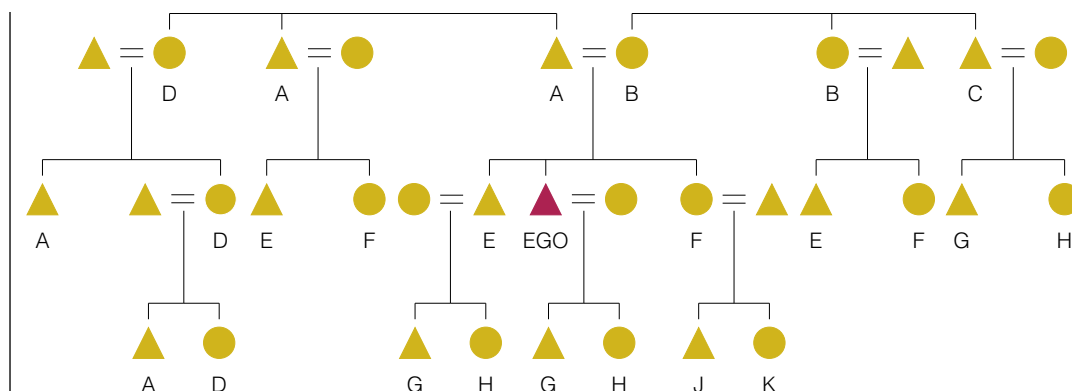
husband's family household. This ritual role of the mother's brother in an Indian marriage ceremony also symbolizes the very important kinship tie in India between brother and sister, which is ritually affirmed every year. These rituals, like other aspects of culture involving kinship, reflect the underlying values of a society.

The kinship and other cultural rules that structure relationships between kin in North India, like those in the Korean village, *are* important. But their function in guiding behavior, just like their function in succession and inheritance described for Korea, are resisted and manipulated in terms of both pragmatic interest, social circumstances, and emotion. Many of the members of my husband's family have migrated to the United States, and this has brought a closeness between our families that has lessened the social distance required by the kinship rules. Contesting claims over family property has also led to some alliances within the family that contrast with cultural rules about seniority and patriarchal power. Illness of some family members has also directed the flow of resources in directions not covered, and even in opposition to, kinship rules governing reciprocity.

In short, as every close examination of kinship in any society reveals, our understanding of culture and society must be based not just on the "rules of the game" but also the realities of the strategies all people use to negotiate their adaptation to life's contingencies.

**Critical Thinking Questions**

1. What are the major differences between the kinship system of North India and that of the United States?
2. What kinds of behavior in the United States are based on kinship relations and kinship ideology?

**FIGURE 9.7**

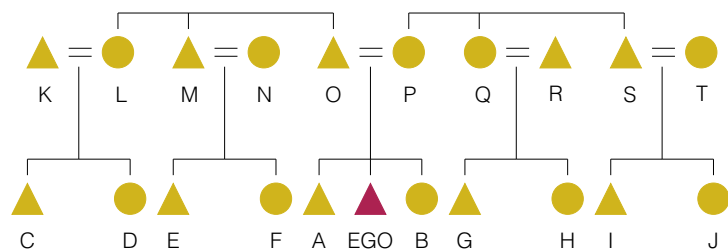
CROW KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY.

### SUDANESE

The most descriptive terminology systems are sometimes called Sudanese systems, after the groups in Africa, primarily in Ethiopia, that use them. 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 (Figure 9.8). Although groups using this system tend to be patrilineal, there are also some elements of matrilineality that distinguishes these kinship systems from other patrilineal systems and may account for this distinctive type of terminology.

The great variety in kinship terminologies calls attention to the fact with which we began this chapter: 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 in which it is found. Thus, the Eskimo system emphasizes the importance of the nuclear family, setting it apart from the 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. At the other extreme, the Sudanese system, with its highly descriptive terminology, may have the same function. In making sense out of kinship systems, anthropologists attempt to understand the relationship between terminologies, rules of descent, and the formation of groups based on kinship and the particular ecological, economic, and political conditions under which different kinship systems emerge.

**FIGURE 9.8**

SUDANESE KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY.

### SUMMARY

1. Kinship systems are cultural creations that define and organize relatives by blood and marriage. A kinship system includes the kinds of groups based on kinship and the system of terms used to classify different kin.

2. The functions of kinship systems are to provide continuity between generations and to define a group of people who can depend on one another for mutual aid.
3. In traditional societies, kinship is the most important basis of social organization. This contrasts with industrial societies, in which citizenship, social class, and common interests become more important than kinship.
4. In many societies, descent is important in the formation of corporate social groups. In societies with a unilineal rule of descent, descent-group membership is based on either the male or female line. Unilineal systems are found among pastoral and cultivating societies.
5. A lineage is a group of kin whose members can trace their descent through 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.
6. In patrilineal systems, a man's children belong to his lineage, as do the children of his sons but not of his daughters. Husbands have control over wives and children, and marriage is surrounded by strong sanctions.
7. In matrilineal systems, 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.
8. Patrilineality grows out of patrilocality, which is based on the common economic interests of brothers. Matrilineality grows out of matrilocality, which arises under special circumstances; when these conditions disappear, the kinship system tends to change.
9. In systems of double descent, Ego 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. In bilateral systems, Ego is equally related to mother's and father's kin. A bilateral rule of descent results in the formation of kindreds, which are Ego-centered kinship networks, rather than a permanent group of kin. Bilateral kinship is found predominantly among foragers and in modern industrialized states.
11. Kinship terminology groups together and distinguishes 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. A comparison of kinship terminology in North India and the United States illustrates these differences.
12. The six types of kinship classification systems are the Hawaiian, Eskimo, Iroquois, Omaha, Crow, and Sudanese. Each reflects the particular kinship group that is most important in the society.

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### KEY TERMS

<b>affinal</b>	<b>kindred</b>
<b>bifurcation</b>	<b>kinship</b>
<b>bilateral descent</b>	<b>kinship system</b>
<b>rule</b>	<b>kinship terminology</b>
<b>clan</b>	<b>lineage</b>
<b>cognatic</b>	<b>lineal kin</b>
<b>collateral kin</b>	<b>matrilineage</b>
<b>consanguineal</b>	<b>matrilineal descent</b>
<b>consanguinity</b>	<b>pater</b>
<b>descent</b>	<b>patrilineage</b>
<b>descent group</b>	<b>patrilineal descent</b>
<b>double descent</b>	<b>phratry</b>
<b>Ego</b>	<b>succession</b>
<b>genitor</b>	<b>totem</b>
<b>inheritance</b>	<b>unilineal descent</b>

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## INTERNET EXERCISES



If you would like to know a bit more about the anthropology of kinship, the Internet is a great place to get the story. Dr. Brian Schwimmer at the University of Manitoba has written an online interactive kinship tutorial with graphics, test questions, and other study aids to help you polish your kin analysis skills. The tutorial includes sections on kin fundamentals, systems of descent, kinship terminology, marriage systems, and residence rules as well as ethnographic examples from a Turkish peasant village and ancient Hebrew society. You can reach Dr. Schwimmer's tutorial at <http://www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/anthropology/kintitle.html>.

