Kinship

= how we connect w/others through descent and marriage

kin related to us thru descent (parent to child) = consanguines

kin related thru marriage = affines (in-laws)

Descent Rules

Cultural recognition of children as kin of one or both parents is basis for concept of descent

Some societies trace thru both parents (Canada & US); other societies = only fathers/only mothers

2 basic descent systems = corporate and cognatic

Cognatic descent: also referred to as non-unilineal descent

- bilateral (36% of cultures)
  - equally descended thru both parents
  - people from both sides of family = relatives
- ambilinaline (< 1% of cultures)
  - relative of either mother’s or father’s family but not both
  - each generation, decision made as to which family children will descend from (e.g., Osage)

Corporate descent: also called unilineal descent

- descent thru single sex line
- patrilineal = father-child (44% of cultures)
  - usually where situations require male solidarity
  - most pastoralists are patrilineal
- matrilineal = mother-child (15% of cultures)
  - unifies groups of women as decision-making bodies
  - in societies where men often absent from local community
  - e.g., Navajo, Tuareg (Sahara Desert)

Descent Groups

In all societies there are social groups whose membership is based on descent:
  - share common ancestor or common living relative

lineages – trace lines of descent to same ancestor
  - trace thru mother’s line = matrilineage
  - trace thru father’s line = patrilineage
  - ambilineal groups = cognatic lineages

clans – groups w/common ancestor but exact genealogy not remembered
- ancestor may be so far back that history becomes distorted and ancestor takes on heroic proportions
- e.g., native American groups have clans – ancient lineages often just referred to as an animal (wolf, raven)
- clans can be huge (large # of people)

phratries – groups of clans thought to be related by kinship
- may be fictitious kinship, but everyone acts as if kin

moieties – one of two descent groups
- e.g., Jomon

kindred – all relatives on both sides (bilateral descent)
- usually see in groups where small family groups more adaptive than large ones and individual mobility high (e.g., industrial societies)
- e.g., me/immediate family/aunts, uncles, cousins and their offspring
- often fall apart when unifying focus dies
- may only get together for funerals, weddings and family reunions

Increasing social complexity often leads to bilateral descent and kindred groups (economically independent)

**Kinship terminology**

= system we use to identify distinctions among relatives important to our lives

- takes into account differences:
  1. paternal vs. maternal kin
  2. generation
  3. differences in relative age
  4. sex
  5. consanguine vs. affinal ties
  6. sex of linking relative

= 6 common types:

1. Hawaiian = simplest/has fewest terms
   - key distinction = generation
   - cousins seen as brothers/sisters
   - father, father’s brother and mother’s brother all = father
   - in simplest sense, kinship terminology = parents, siblings, children
   - common where nuclear families dependent on other kin; emphasizes cohesion of extended family

2. Eskimo = what US uses
   - mother, father, sister, brother not used for relative outside of the nuclear family
   - aunt, uncle, cousin, grandfather/mother used for both sides of family
   - associated w/societies where nuclear family economically independent (bilateral and kindreds)
3. Omaha = terms come from contrast b/t paternal and maternal relatives
   - small # of terms to refer to many different kin
   - patrilineal societies
   - members of mother’s line distinguished only by sex; e.g., all males from mother’s side = one term; on father’s side, men distinguished by generation

4. Crow = flip side of Omaha
   - matrilineal societies
   - father’s line distinguished by sex only

5. Iroquois = different terms for maternal and paternal relatives but don’t merge generations that marry into the lineage
   - found in groups of unilineal descent (matrilineal)

6. Sudanese = largest terminology
   - nuclear family terms
   - terms for both maternal and paternal uncles, aunts, cousins
   - patrilineal descent most often occurring in North Africa

Now, also have instances of FICTIVE kinship – not relatives by descent or marriage
   - ceremonial relatives
     - godparents
   - “brotherhoods” “sisterhoods”
   - “urban” family