

Kinship Dynamics

Kinship Theory

Kinship is a measure of relatedness between individuals of any species whether it is by blood, marriage, adoption, or connections that unite one another. It is universal, but what defines kinship for each culture varies to a great extent. Rules between cultures differ in degree from simple marriage laws to complex webs of marriage relationships which involve large numbers of people. One often takes kinship for granted not realizing the cultural significance behind it, and oppositely opening up to understand what lies within kinship between other cultures. The complexity of different culture's kinship is very challenging to learn and on top of that, hard to accept since it may be much different from the "norm". Understanding kinship and the relationship that lies within offers surprising discoveries. Anthropologists focus on comparative studies of kinship looking to discover universal patterns and the different forms that they take on in specific societies. Studies are classified as to which aspects can be considered as invariant and why regularities and variations occur.

“Sociobiologists take a reductionist position and see all family institutions as conforming to a basic plan which reflects human biological and evolutionary necessities. On the other hand, relativists maintain that kinship has no intrinsic relationship to biology and is unlimited in its possible forms.” (Schwimmer, 1995).

The complete variety of kinship cannot be explained and represented for every different culture,

but similarities and differences have been categorized into broad areas to give a characterization of what each culture represents. As a result, kinship needs to be discovered and accepted by society, because without this, discrimination and racism will play a predominant role and make this world an unhealthy place to live.

Descent

Descent is a category used by anthropologists when classifying kinships of different cultures. Descent is the “kinship relationship traced through parent-child links” (Miller and Esterik, 188). It creates a line of people from whom someone is descended, expanding through history. There are two categories of descent seen in cultures. One type is the unilineal descent system. This type of descent is used to represent only one parent (father or mother), and represent approximately 60% of culture in the world (Miller and Esterik, 192). Unilineal descent is broken into two types of descents: matrilineal descent, and patrilineal descent. Matrilineal descent system acknowledges the significance of women by tracing descent through female trace. This is common in about 15 % of all cultures (Miller and Esterik, 194). Kinship is traced through the female line, and the children belong to their mother’s group. For example, in this type of descent, women have control over production, distribution of food and goods, and also inherit property. Also, after marriage, marital residence is granted with or near the bride’s family. Most commonly you will find this type of descent with Native groups across the world. The patrilineal descent system can be seen affiliated with males being the dominant roles, while women are complementary to them. It is found among 44 % of all cultures (Miller and Esterik, 193). Women are usually involved with roles in animal care, food processing, weeding and harvesting (Miller and Esterik, 188). Men inherit property, and determine where the couple will reside with

or near the man's family. Patrilineal descent originates from different ideologies, for example the ideology from the Kaliai people of Papua New Guinea. They believe that an infant is composed entirely of "fathers water" or semen (Miller and Esterik, 193). Mother's are seen as just the carrier, and having no real significant contribution to the developing fetus.

A small amount of cultures incorporate both descents into a double descent system. In this system one may find offspring inheriting different personal property from their father's and mother's line. When broken down into its parts, patrilineal ties determine rights to land and village residence, while matrilineally related women come together and become close friends helping each other on picking marriage partners for their children, names for their child's, and being there in times of trouble. With this descent system, there is still separation between children due to their sex. Bilineal descent is another incorporation between patrilineal and matrilineal systems, but in this case the children receive equality in their kinship relationship regardless of their sex. These families share strong bonds within the system deriving from the theories of conceptions that concentrate on equal biological contributions to the child from both parents. **Ambilineal** descent allows a person who descended from both parents to choose in which descent group to be more affiliated with. The theories with this belief are of the males sperm being equally important as the ovum contributed by the female for the forming of a new person.

These ideas vary greatly from culture to culture, and the question whether a culture is matrilineal or patrilineal has not yet been answered, but the status and roles for each gender are been discovered more clearly as we learn more as time passes.

Schematic Diagrams

Anthropologists use diagrams to construct a schematic way of presenting data on the

kinship relationships of an individual known as the “ego”. The ego depicts their relatives and they are reported by the anthropologist to construct this diagram. Information is only reported from the ego, and not acquired from any relatives. Genealogy is another type of schematic diagram, but it differs from a kinship diagram by the fact it is constructed beginning with the earliest ancestors that can be traced and working down to the present. These diagrams vary from culture to culture, and varieties have been classified into six basic types which are named after groups that were first discovered to have that type of system. Many cultures have different naming systems for relatives which make each and every culture unique in its own way. For example, in North India, one’s father’s brother is called “chacha, and one’s mother’s brother “mama”, compared to “aunt” and “uncle” which is used by many Canadians today (Miller and Esterik, 190). Another system uses the same name for siblings of the same gender, for example, one’s mother and one’s mother’s sister all have the same term. All these examples represent the diverse cultures earth possess and the uniqueness most people don’t even know about.

Sharing

In many cultures, kinship is not based on biologically defined birth. Sharing and support are what they define as kinship, and do not have to be a formal certified relationship like adoption.

An example of this kinship is the ritual of godparents. One example of sharing used to define kinship is through what parents contribute to their children at birth. Fathers are viewed as related by descent, but mothers are related by breastfeeding, or sharing of food. This occurs in Southeast Asia, parts of Australia, and New Guinea (Miller and Esterik, 198).

Adoption

Adoption is when biological parents decide to foster their child to another family. This is

done by all cultures in some way or another. This helps assist couples with problems do to conceiving a child. Some cultures that have too many children even have to option to give some away. Kinship in this situation has to be researched very in-depth. According to an anthropologist named Judith Modell,

“The biological relationship of kinship is so pervasive in that the legal process of adoption attempts to construct the adoptive relationship to be as much like a biological one as possible.” (Miller and Esterik, 199).

Closed adoption and open adoption are results of adoption. Closed adoption doesn't allow adoptees and birth parents to have access to information about each other as well as interacting. Open adoption is the exact opposite of such.

In China, there are villages that take part in “sim-pua” marriages. These marriages occur when a female from a poorer family is given up for adoption to another poor family with a son for who she is to marry. This saves costs in marriage because the new family in which the female is living with doesn't have to give up money to her previous family for a wedding. This girl is often treated very poorly. These marriages are theorized to not last long due to **Westermarck's hypothesis**. This hypothesis states that,

“early childhood association inhibits sexual attraction between those children raised together and can even lead to sexual aversion.” (Miller and Esterik, 200).

This shows that not all resolutions have answers that benefit in the long run.

Marriage

Anthropologists have discovered that marriage exists in all cultures in some way or another. Usually marriages are defined by different sex unifications, but in Ontario and a few other countries like Sweden and Denmark, same sex marriages occur. Not always do marriages involve only two people, but many cultures allow more than one partner. An example is with the Nayar tribe. In this tribe, men often go off to war for many years and leave their wives by themselves. It is not uncommon for wives to seek other males company during this period, while the husband knows full well. When females have marriage with more than one man it is called **polyandry**. When males have marriage with more than one female, it is called **polygamy**. Explanations for these events are do to: evolutionary tendencies, and where one gender's contribution to the economy is more important. In some cultures, females are only allowed to marry a male who is above her status. This is called **hypergyny**. The opposite to such is called **hypogyny**. One may find cultures where women marry women, not for romantic reasons, but to help one another out. These two women then can seek a husband to share. Other cultures have preference rules for marriage, where there is a "pool" of people who you are allowed to choose from. This is called **endogamy**. Other cultures allow the marriages of cousins known as **parallel cousins** or **cross cousins**. As one can see, the variation from culture to culture is enormous, but unfortunately through the eyes of a society looking into one of these cultures, it is considered bizarre.

Final

As a result, one can see that our world includes an enormous variety of cultures.

=> Unfortunately racism and discrimination is still present in today's society, but hopefully with the study of kinship, we hope that more cultures will be exposed and understood to help defeat this horrible problem.