

Chapter 21 – Marital Residence and Kinship

MAJOR POINTS FOR REVIEW - CHAPTER SUMMARY

Welcome to the chapter that deals with the true heart of social anthropology: Marital residence and Kinship. These are the bases for most other social relationships into which humans enter. Where people move when they marry (if they do at all), how they are related to other people, and how kinship is defined are the important components of this chapter.

It is here that we find some of the greatest variations in human social behavior. We take it for granted that our grandparents on both sides of our family are equivalent. Yet in some societies not only would this not be the case, but one side or the other would not even be related. It happens also that a mother or father may not be a relative in some societies.

Marital residence is perhaps the simplest of these concepts to follow. There are five basic ways in which a newly married couple can be placed; patrilocal, matrilocal, bilocal, avunculocal, or even neolocal. The reasons for these arrangements are complex, and yet logical at the same time.

Kinship relationships are very important in noncommercial societies. These relationships may very well determine the access an individual has to various resources, or political alliances. Because of this, who your relatives are is of greatest importance. Societies have developed rules of descent in order to help the individual. Each individual knows who to turn to in order to receive help because of these rules. Societies that have descent rules with links of one sex only are unilineal (matrilineal and patrilineal). These groups can be further divided into various types such as lineages, clans, phratries, moieties, or even combinations of the four. Unilineal descent groups further function in the social arena by controlling whom one marries, defining political alliances, and may even determine specific religious beliefs and practices.

Kinship can also be bilateral or ambilineal. North Americans are the most familiar with bilateral kinship where both sides of the family are related to the individual. Kinship reckoning, rather than being vertical, is horizontal. This system does not trace to a common ancestor. Ambilineal systems, on the other hand, are fairly rare. While this system is very similar to unilineal descent systems in many ways, it does vary in that an individual may be related through men or women. Some people in a society may be related through their fathers, while others are related through their mothers.

Finally, this chapter deals with how we classify our kin. Kinship terminology has long been confusing to students of anthropology for the simple reason that the variation in methods of naming relatives is great and quite different from our own. Two terms must be understood before anything else in this section makes sense: consanguineal-relatives related through blood, and affinal-relatives related through marriage. Six systems of identifying relatives (kin) exist throughout the world (we did not study these in class). These systems are related quite closely to types of descent groups. They either divide kin into quite complex webs of relationships (as in our own system) or they tend to lump many people into the same classification. In all systems however, it is the needs of society that have arranged these complex formulations.

DEFINING THE GLOSSARY TERMS

Check your understanding of Chapter 21 by defining each of the glossary terms.

Affinal kin

Avunculocal residence

Ambilineal descent

Bilateral kinship

ANTHROPOLOGY

Kinship

Clan or sib

Moiety

Classificatory term

Neolocal Residence

Consanguineal kin

Patriclan

Descriptive term

Patrilineage

Ego

Patrilineal descent

Kindred

Patrilocal residence

Lineage

Phratry

Matriclan

Siblings

Matrilineage

Totem

Matrilineal descent

Unilocal residence

Matrilocal residence

Unilineal descent