Kinship Systems

Descent and Terminology
Kinship and Descent Groups

• Refers to ties by blood, marriage and adoption

• Kinship has both a biological and cultural dimension
Functions

• Regulates access to property
• Ceremonial Functions
• Regulates labor
• Regulates access to leadership
Descent Groups

• A kind of kinship in which membership requires being a direct lineal descendant of a real or mythical ancestor
  – Unilineal--descent through male or female line
  – Bilateral--descent through both male and female line
Descent Groups

• Evolve from the organization of extended families

• Associated with food producing societies
Descent Groups

• Extended families unite descent groups

  – Cross-cousin marriage
    • Mother’s Brother’s child
    • Father Sister’s child

  – Consanguinal vs. Affinal Kin
Kinship Diagrams

- Male
- Female
- Ego

Marriage
Offspring
Sibling
Patrilineal Descent Group

• Tracing descent through the male line

• Keeps males together when cooperative labor is required
Patrilineal Descent
Matrilineal Descent

- Descent traced through the female’s line or group - cooperative labor of women

- Mother’s Brother is the dominant male figure
  - Distributes goods
  - Organizes work
  - Settles disputes
  - Controls inheritance
  - Legal authority
Lineage

- Corporate Descent Group
- Consanguineal Kin
- Claim descent from a common ancestor
- traced through known lines
- Unilineal descent
- Ancestor oriented
- Exogamous - Cross-cousin marriages
- Residential Unity
Clans

• Non-Corporate Descent Group
• Claiming descent from a common ancestor without knowing the links
• Assumed links rather than known
• Lacks residential unity
• Depends on Symbols
  – Ex. Totem Pole
KINSHIP TERMINOLOGICAL SYSTEMS

• Way of labeling relatives
  – Descriptive
  – Classifactory

• Terms are “cues” to behavior

• Terms differentiate kin
  – by sex, by generation, by genealogy
Iroquois Kinship System