

# KINSHIP & FAMILY

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**ANTH 380/Traditional Cultures**

# *Why study kinship?*

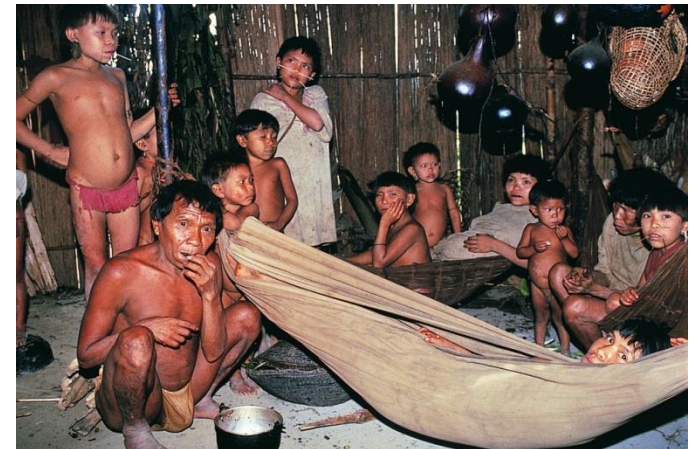
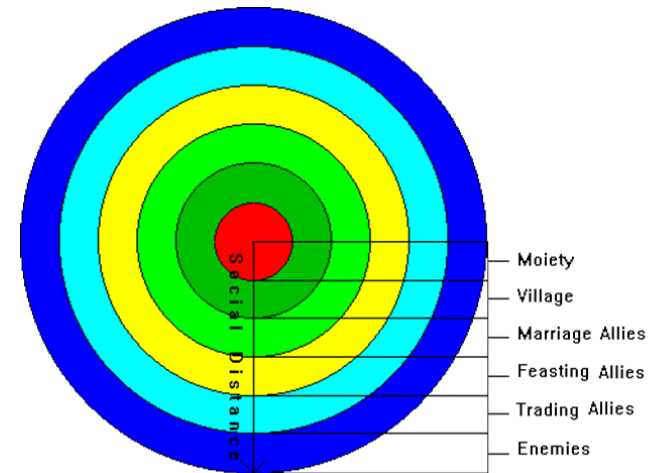
- Important in understanding small-scale, non-western societies that anthropologists traditionally studied.
  - kinship is most important social organizing principle along with gender & age.
- In large-scale industrial societies impact of kinship on daily life is lessened by factors such as:
  - Occupation
  - Social class
  - Ethnicity (nationality)
  - Education
  - Political affiliation
  - Religion

# Yanomamo, as described by Napoleon Chagnon

"In a word, *everyone in Yanomamo society is called by some kinship term* that can be translated into what we would call blood relatives.

To be sure they "extend" kinship terms to strangers who are nonkin... Nobody can escape it, not even the anthropologist. Everyone gets placed into some sort of kinship matrix which, to a large degree, specifies "in principle" how one is expected to behave vis-a-vis his or her kin of that category.

*To be outside the kinship system is to be inhuman or nonhuman:* real humans are some sort of kin. It is in this sense that anthropologists say that primitive society is, to a large degree, organized and regulated by kinship" (Chagnon, page 142).



## Yanomamo kinship terminology

# What is kinship?

- *Culturally defined relationships* between individuals who are commonly thought of as having family ties.
- Although usually thought of in terms of **biology**, much of kinship is actually ***culturally constructed***.
  - ***Consanguineal relatives***: people on both sides of family related to you by blood.
  - ***Affinal relatives***: people who are related to you through marriage.
  - ***Fictive kinship***: patterned on kin-like relations but not actually based upon blood or marriage.
    - Godparents/coparents (compadrazgo in Latin America), “aunts”, “uncles”, “brothers”, “sisters”.
    - Adoption

# Functions of kinship

1. **Vertical function** – binding together successive generations, thereby providing social continuity.
  - Passing on property, political office, & tradition.
2. **Horizontal function** – tying people together across a single generation through marriage practices.
  - Kin groups usually practice some degree of **exogamy** – rule which states that you must marry outside a certain group.
  - People must normally look outside for marriage partners and create alliances with other groups.
  - Alliances can be useful for political, economic, ceremonial purposes.

## KINSHIP AND DESCENT: SOME CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

At this stage, it is worth making more clear some conceptual points regarding kinship and descent as cultural principles:

**TABLE 1**

<i>KINSHIP</i>	<i>DESCENT</i>
1. Defined with reference to an individual (ego) or pairs of individuals.	1. Defined with reference to an ancestor (or ancestress).
2. Universally important.	2. Culturally recognized only in some societies.
3. Normally bilateral, from the standpoint of an ego.	3. Connects (through relatedness to a common ancestor) only a limited class of ego's relatives.
4. Kinship relationships are relative; you are a son or a nephew only in relation to some particular person.	4. Descent status is, in a sense, absolute. You are, or are not, a member of a particular descent group.

# Descent

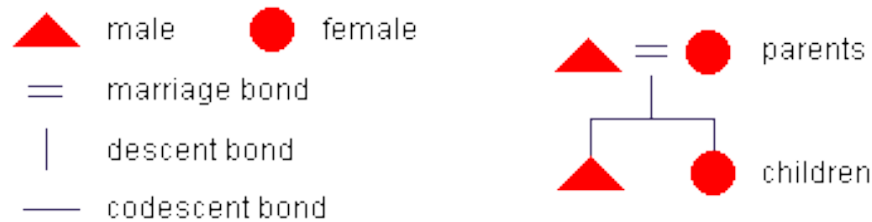
- *Socially recognized links between ancestors & descendants.*
- Rules people use to:
  - determine parenthood.
  - identify ancestry.
  - assign people to social categories, groups, & roles on basis of inherited status.
- Descent systems are divided into:
  1. unilineal systems : descent traced through parents & ancestors of only 1 sex (either mother's or father's side).
  2. cognatic systems : descent traced through either or both parents.
- Only 30% of world's cultures trace descent & base group membership on cognatic principle.
- Unilineal kinship institutions occur at over twice the incidence of cognatic ones among the world's cultures.

# Unilineal descent

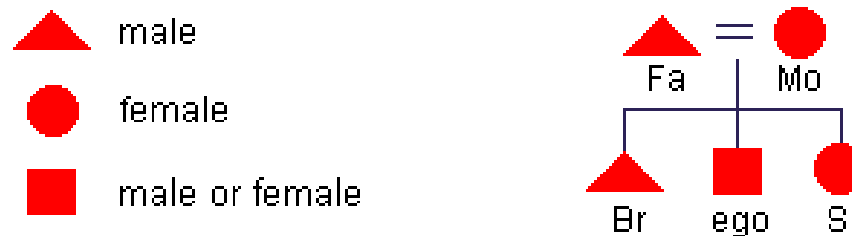
- Many societies construct kinship groupings, roles, and relationships by tracing descent exclusively through the male - **patrilineal** - or female - **matrilineal** - line.
- The resulting units are called **unilineal descent groups**, either **patrilineages** or **matrilineages** according to the prevailing descent rule.
- Unilineal kinship institutions occur at over twice the incidence of cognatic ones among the world's cultures.
- In many societies, unilineal descent groups assume important corporate functions such as land ownership, political representation and mutual aid and support.
- The powerful West African Ashanti kingdom developed within a matrilineal society. Accordingly, the heir to the throne is not the king's (Asantehene's) own child but his sister's son.
- Early British emissaries to Ashanti learned about this family system the hard way.
- A third unilineal form, dual descent, involves the presence of significant patrilineal and matrilineal groupings in single society. Their occurrence is relatively rare.



# Symbols



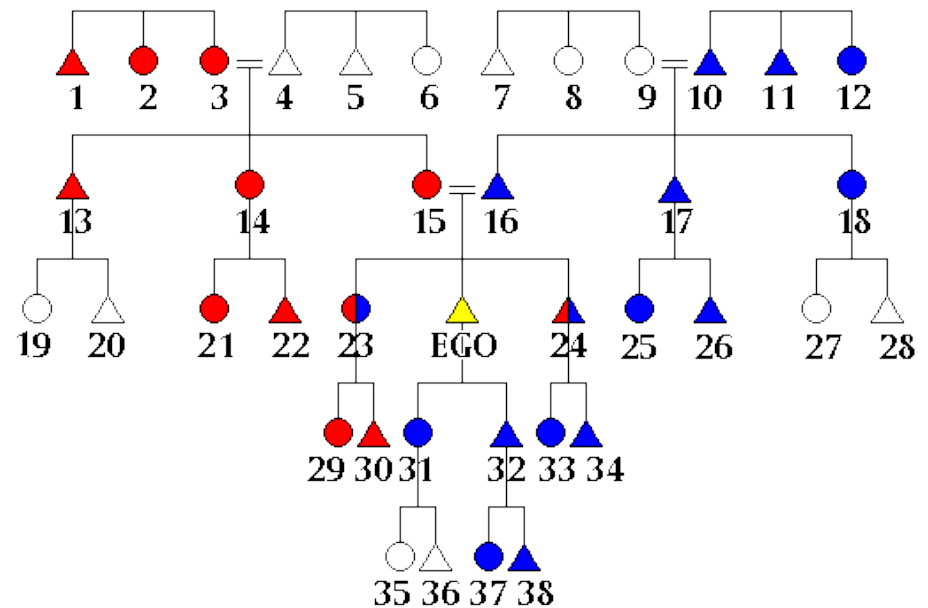
Kinship is reckoned in a number of different ways around the world, resulting in a variety of types of descent patterns and kin groups. Anthropologists frequently use diagrams to illustrate kinship relationships to make them more understandable. The symbols shown here are usually employed. They may be combined, as in the example on the right, to represent a family consisting of a married couple and their children.



In kinship diagrams, one individual is usually labeled as ego. This is the person to whom all kinship relationships are referred. In the case above on the right, ego has a brother (Br), sister (Si), father (Fa), and mother (Mo). Note also that ego is shown as being gender nonspecific--that is, either male or female.

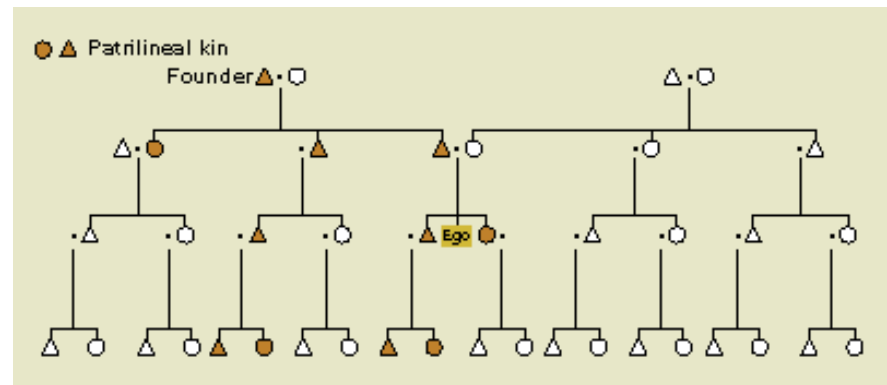
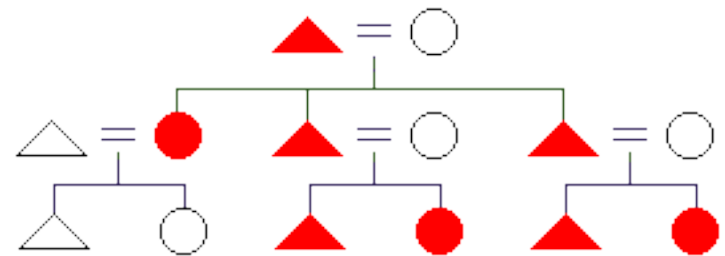
# Unilineal Descent

- Most cultures limit range of people through whom descent is traced by using principle of unilineal descent.
- Traces descent only through a single line of ancestors, male or female.
- Both males & females are members of a unilineal grouping, but descent links only recognized through relatives of one sex.
- The two basic forms of unilineal descent are referred to as **patrilineal** and **matrilineal**.



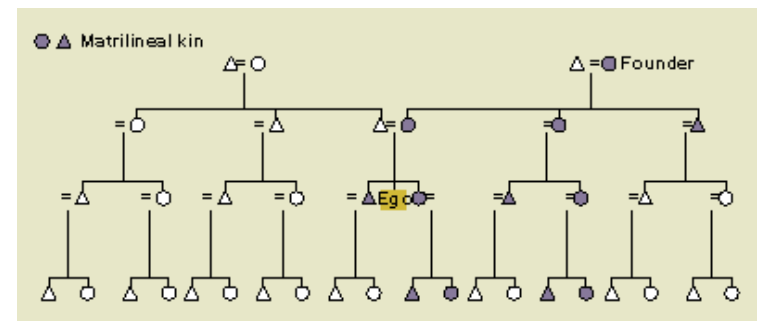
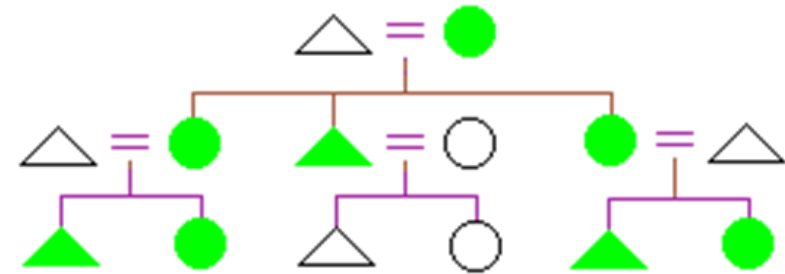
# Patrilineal descent

- With patrilineal descent, both males & females belong to their father's kin group but not their mother's.
- Only males pass on their family identity to their children.
- A woman's children are members of her husband's patrilineal line.



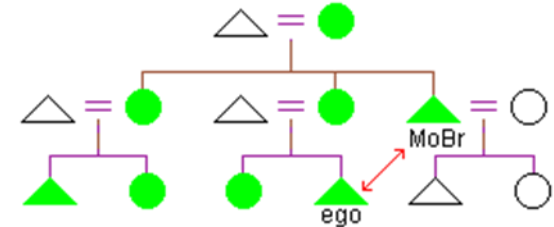
# Matrilineal descent

- Form of unilineal descent that follows a female line.
- Individuals are relatives if they can trace descent through females to the same female ancestor.
- While both male & female children are members of their mother's matrilineal descent group, only daughters pass on family line to their offspring.



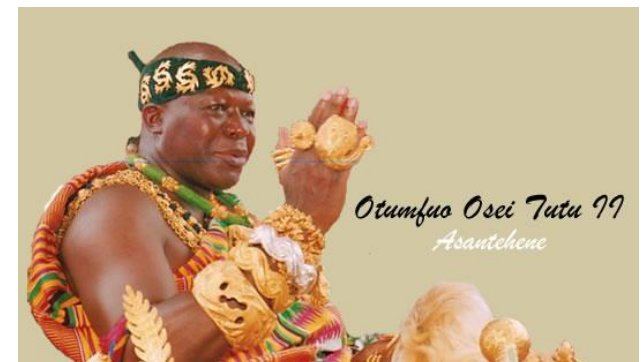
# Mother's brother

- In societies with matrilineal descent, *social relationship between children & their biological father is different* b/c father is not member of matrilineal group.
- In case of ego, *man who would have formal responsibilities that our culture assigns to father would be his mother's brother (MoBr)*, since he is closest elder male kinsmen.
- Ego's father would have same kind of responsibilities for his sister's children.
- Inheritance patterns for men in matrilineal societies often reflect importance of mother's brother.



# Ashanti

- Example: powerful West African Kingdom of Ashanti in central Ghana, represents a matrilineal society.
- Heir to the throne is not the Asantehene's own child but his sister's son
  - king traditionally passes title & status on to his sister's son.
- King's biological son does not inherit kingship because he is not a member of ruling matrilineal family group.
- Women usually inherit status & property directly from their mothers in matrilineal societies.



# Conditions favoring unilineal descent

- Most commonly (but not exclusively) found among materially rich foragers, small-scale farmers, and nomadic pastoralists.
- Common factors: small populations that usually have more than adequate food supplies.
- Until early 20th century, approximately 60% of all societies traced descent unilineally.
- Since then, many of these societies have disappeared or have been absorbed by larger societies that follow other descent rules.

# Correlations between subsistence & descent

**Table 8-1** DESCENT AND TYPES OF SUBSISTENCE\*

Subsistence Type	Descent System									
	Patrilineal		Bilateral		Matrilineal		Duolineal		Total	
	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)
Plow agriculture	69	(59)	38	(32)	9	(8)	1	(1)	117	(100)
Horticulture	109	(41)	86	(32)	57	(21)	15	(6)	267	(100)
Pastoralism	51	(65)	19	(24)	5	(6)	4	(5)	79	(100)
Extractive (Hunting & Gathering)	19	(19)	61	(60)	13	(13)	8	(8)	101	(100)
Totals	248	(44)	204	(36)	84	(15)	28	(5)	564	(100)

\* Source: Summary of table in Aberle 1961: 677.

**TABLE 8**

Descent and Subsistence Modes. Percentages show proportion within each column (e.g., percent of total matrilineal descent systems associated with dominant horticulture).

SUBSISTENCE TYPE	DESCENT SYSTEM									
	Patrilineal		Bilateral*		Matrilineal		Duolineal**		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Plough agricul- ture	69	28	38	19	9	11	1	4	117	21
African horticul- ture (large domestic animals)	32	13	3	2	5	6	6	21	46	8
Dominant horticulture	66	27	68	33	47	56	7	25	188	33
Other horticul- ture	11	4	15	7	5	6	2	7	33	6
Pastoralists	51	21	8	4	3	4	4	14	66	12
New World pastoralists	0	0	11	5	2	2	0	0	13	2
Hunting and gathering/ fishing	19	8	61	30	13	16	8	29	101	18
TOTAL	248	101	204	100	84	101	28	100	564	100

\* Includes a range of bilateral and cognatic forms of organization.

\*\* Includes double descent systems and Australian section systems.



# Relative Frequency

- Worldwide, patrilineal societies occur at roughly twice incidence of matrilineal societies.
- 60% of all unilineal systems
- 30% of all descent systems (unilineal & cognatic) throughout world.

**Incidence of Descent Rules among Unilineal Societies**

Descent rule	Number	Percentage
<u>Patrilineal</u>	105	60%
<u>Matrilineal</u>	52	30%
<u>Dual</u>	18	10%
<b>Total</b>	175	100%

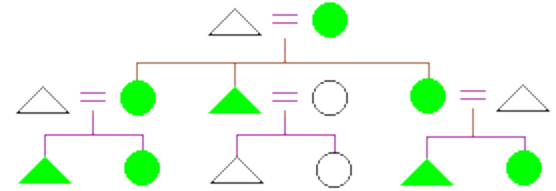
**TABLE 2**

Frequency of Descent Rules (Based on Aberle 1961; derived from Murdock 1957.) (Originally published by the University of California Press; reprinted by permission of The Regents of the University of California.)

<i>DESCENT TYPE</i>	<i>NUMBER OF CULTURES</i>	<i>%</i>
Patrilineal	248	44
Matrilineal	84	15
Double and bilineal*	28	5
Bilateral and other	205	36
	565	100

# Descent groups - lineages

- When unilineal descent principle is applied people become members of multi-generational groups of close relatives called **lineages**.
- May be **matrilineages** or they may be **patrilineages** depending on whether links are traced through women or men.
- Members of a lineage *can actually trace links back to common ancestor*.



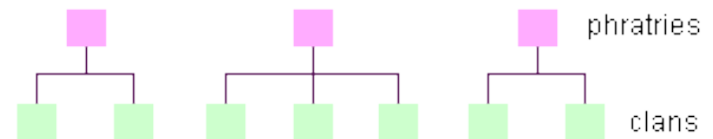
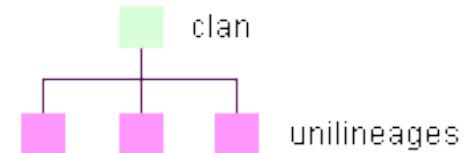
### Three generations of a small matrilineage



## Members of a lineage in New Guinea

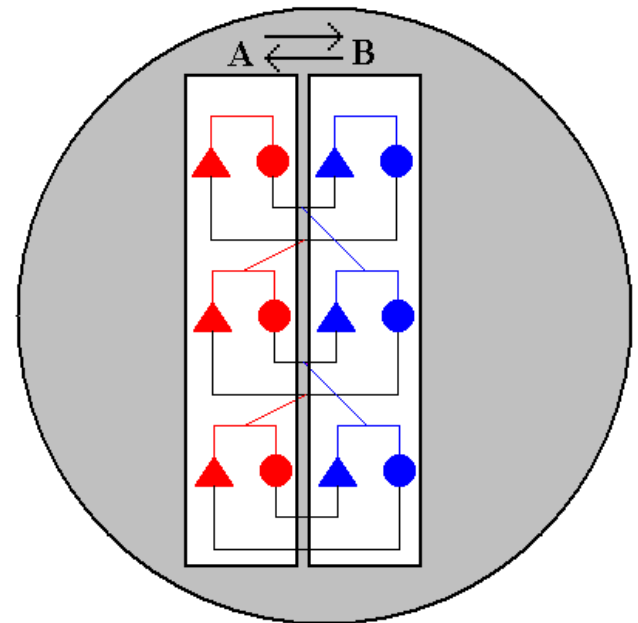
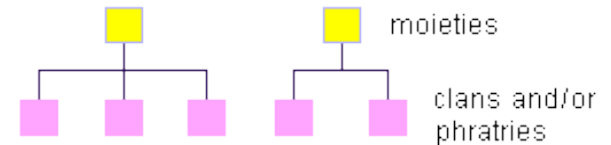
# Clans & phratries

- Societies with lineages often define larger, more inclusive kin groups called **clans** – groups of people who *claim descent from a common ancestor but cannot specify all actual links*.
- Ancestor is often genealogically so remote that he/she is thought of as a mythical being.
  - Such distant, non-human ancestors become identifying symbols of the clan, or totems.
- Some unilineal societies group clans into even larger-scale unilineal descent groups called **phratries**.
- Just as with clans, actual genealogical links are not clear – **phratry** ancestors are usually mythical.



# Moieties

- Entire societies may be divided into *two large unilineal descent groups* that have reciprocal responsibilities.
- Moieties are intended to produce a balanced opposition within society – linked pairs assume complementary positions & functions.
- Constantly reinforced social & economic exchanges encourages economic equality & political stability.
- Moieties are usually exogamous
  - Each moiety takes husbands & wives from matched group.
- As with clans & phratries, moiety members cannot demonstrate descent links back to supposed common ancestor.



# Functions of unilineal descent groups

- Membership in lineages, clans, moieties, & phratries is inherited & usually continues throughout life.
- As result, unilineal descent groups often function successfully as long-term joint *property owners & economic production teams*.
- In many societies, unilineal descent groups assume important corporate functions such as land ownership, political representation & mutual aid & support.

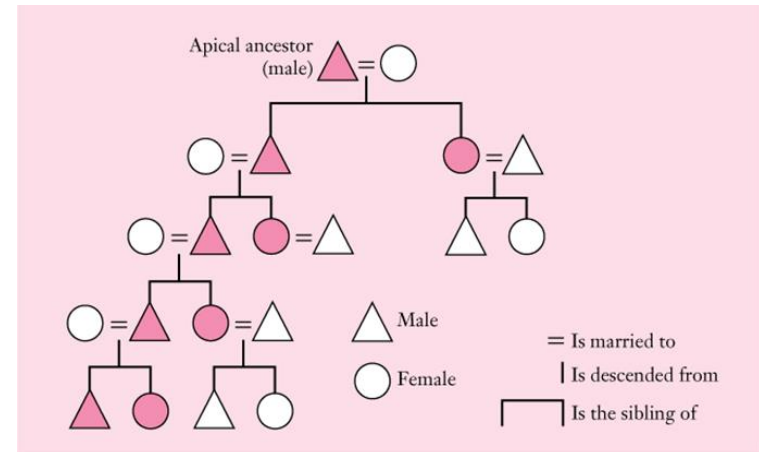
# Descent Groups in Agrarian Societies

- In *sedentary agrarian societies*, descent groups are permanent social units whose members claim common ancestry.
- Membership life-long & determined at birth.
- Group endures over time even though membership changes.

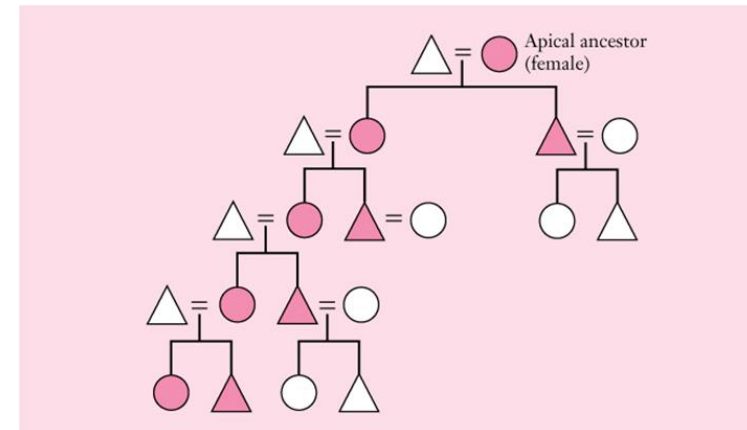


# Lineages, clans, & residence rules

- Members of descent groups have access to lineage resources, especially land.
- Descent principles have parallel rules of **post-marital residence**:
  - **Patrilocal**: married couples & children live in husband's community.
    - Usually found with *patrilineal descent*.
  - **Matrilocal**: married couples & their children live in wife's community
    - Associated with *matrilineal descent*
- Unilocal post-marital residence rules ensure that only  $\frac{1}{2}$  people born in each generation will live on ancestral estate (land).



Five generation Patrilineage



Five generation Matrilineage



# Marriage

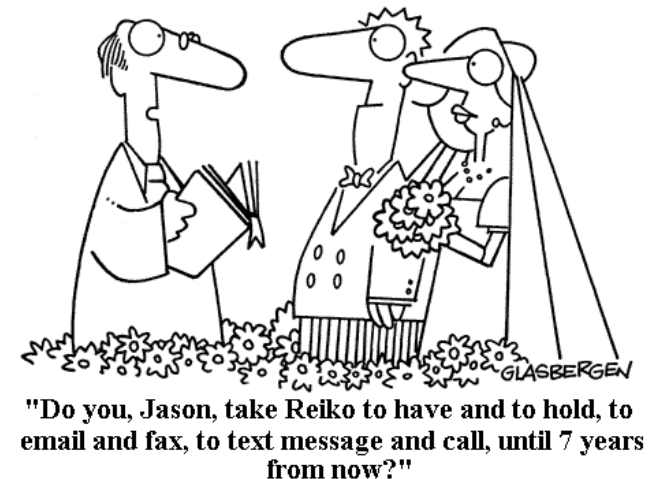
- Although marriage is a human cultural/social universal there can be significant variation in:
  - motivations for it.
  - functions it performs.
  - forms it takes.
  - degree of permanence.



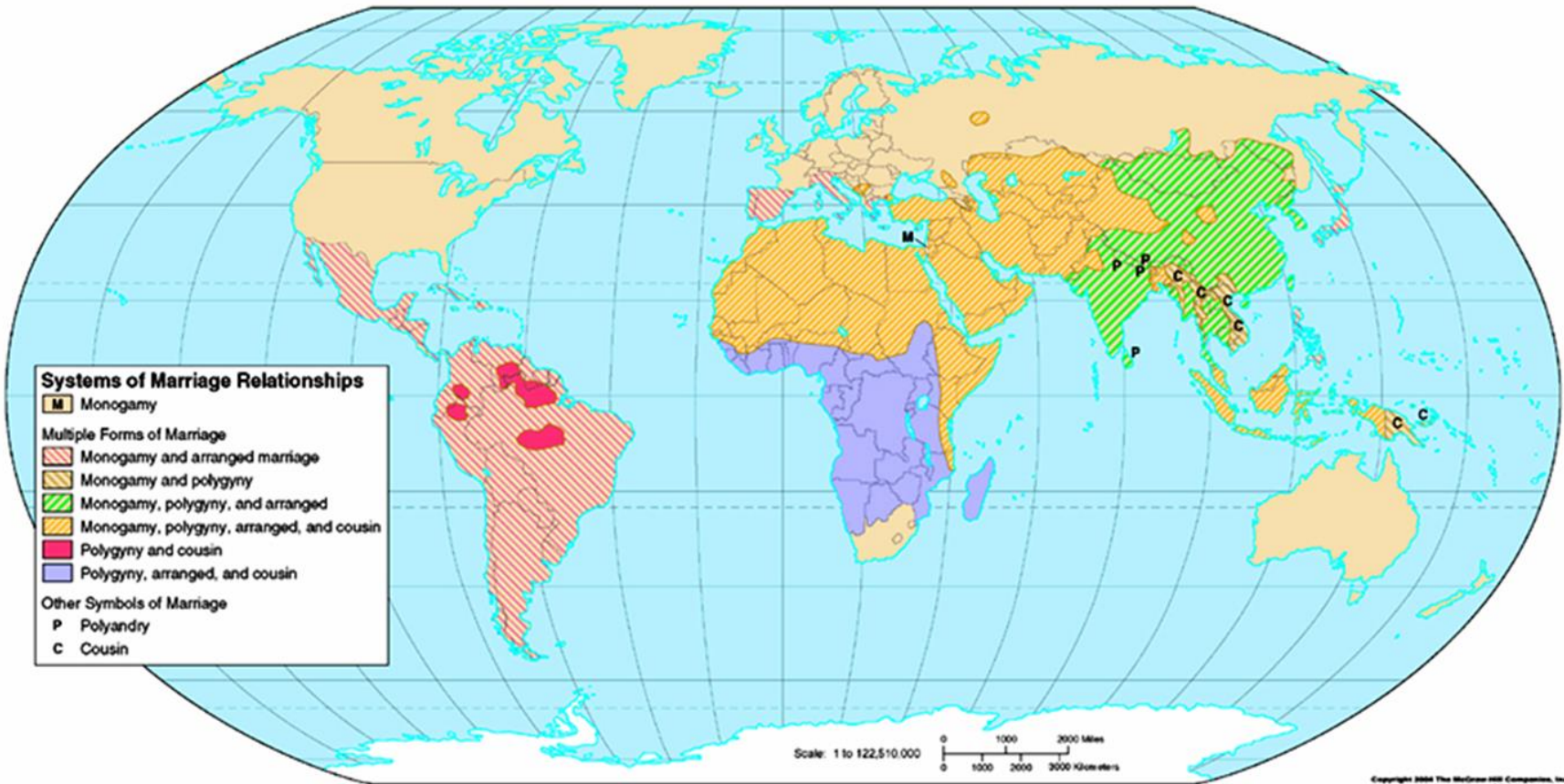


# Marriage

- No single definition of marriage broad enough to apply to *all* human societies & cultures.
- Edmund Leach suggested that marriage *can allocate rights*:
  - Can establish legal father & mother of children.
  - Can give either/both spouses monopoly on sexuality of other.
  - Can give either/both spouses rights to labor of other.
  - Can give either/both spouses rights over other's property.
  - Can establish joint fund of property for children
  - Can establish socially significant "relationships of affinity" between spouses & their relatives.



# Systems of Marriage Relationships



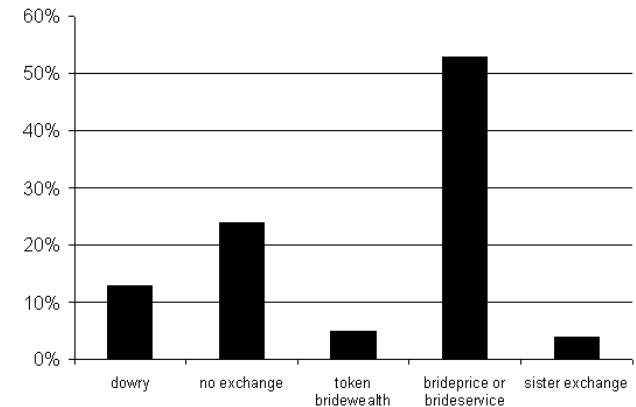
# Nature of marriage

- In non-industrial societies, marriage is more often a **relationship between groups** rather than between *individuals*.
- Romantic love can exist, but marriage is often more a group/family concern.
- Maasai attitudes about love.
- Maasai Women (preview)
- Maasai attitudes toward polygyny

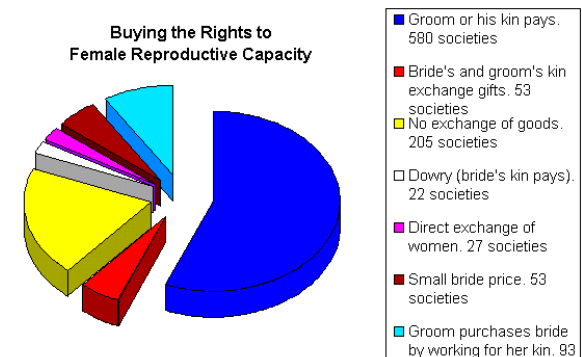


# Marital transactions

- In societies with descent groups gifts commonly given at marriage and not only to individuals being married.
- **Bridewealth & Dowry**
  - **Bridewealth:** customary gift(s) before/at/after marriage *from husband & his kin to wife & her kin.*
    - Also called **progeny price** b/c makes children full members of their father's descent group.
    - Common in patrilineal groups.
  - **Dowry:** *wife's family provides gifts to husband's family.*
    - Tends to correlate with relatively low status for women.



Types of Economic Transactions at Marriage Across Cultures





# Marriage as durable alliance *between groups*

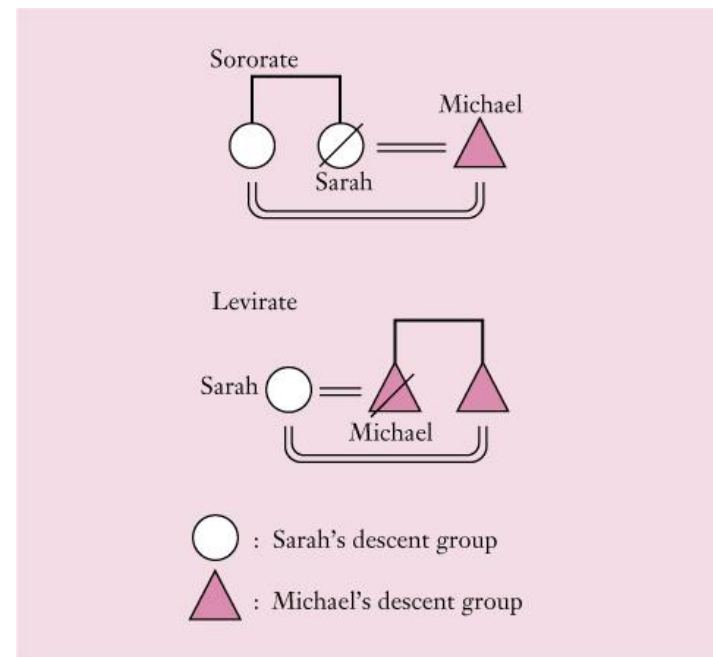
- **Sororate**

- widower marries one of his deceased wife's sisters.

- **Levirate**

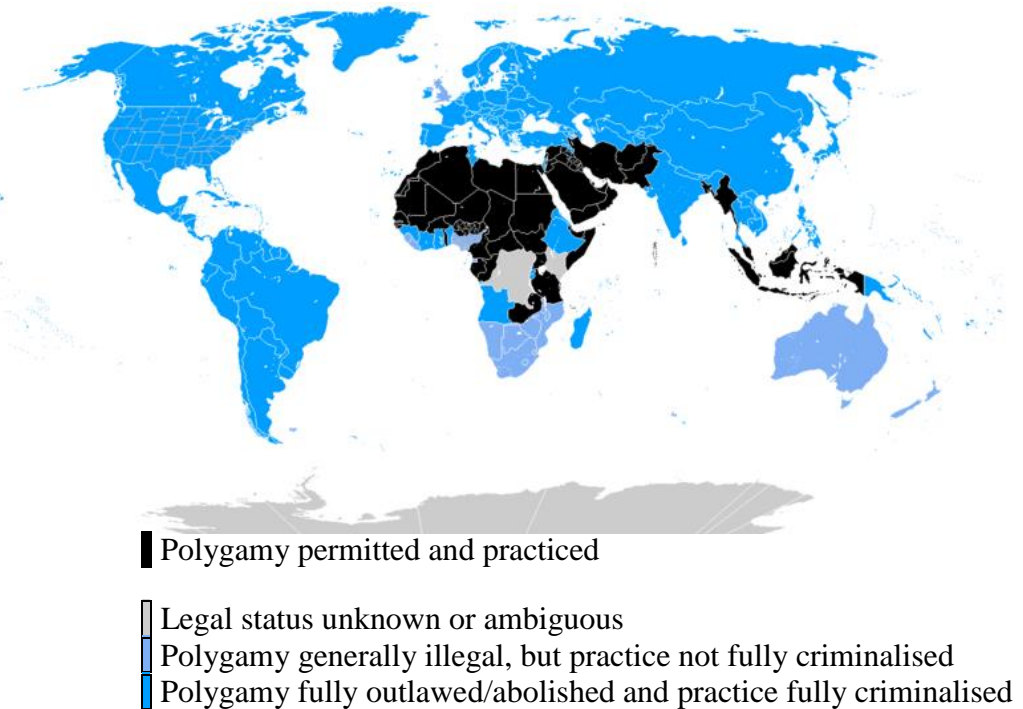
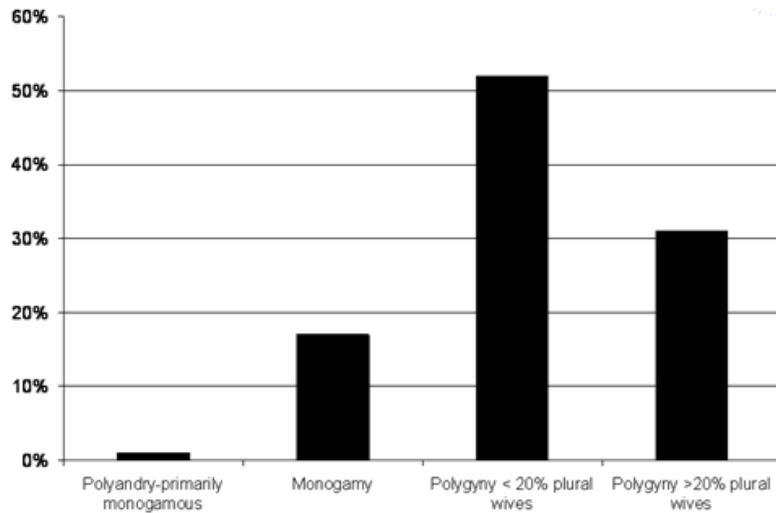
- widow marries one of her deceased husband's brothers.
- “Uh excuse me Dr. Roberts, what happens if the deceased spouse doesn't have a sibling?”
- Answer is \_\_\_\_\_?

## Sororate & Levirate



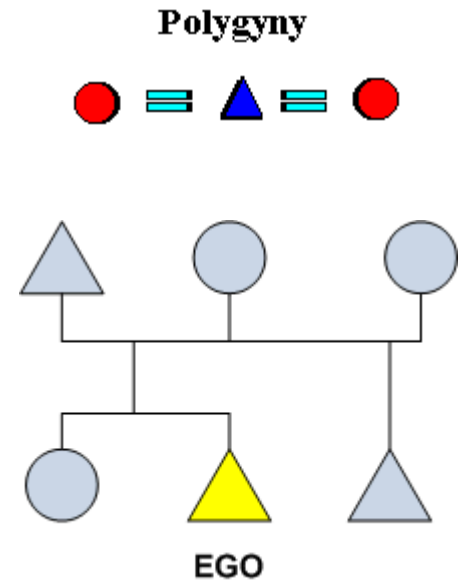
# Marriage types

Frequency of Marriage Types Across Cultures



# Plural Marriages

- Polygyny = 1 man + multiple women.
  - *Even when polygyny is permitted or encouraged monogamy will still be norm.*
- Why?
  - Roughly equal sex ratios.
  - Expense of bridewealth.
  - Potential friction between co-wives.
- Reasons for presence of polygyny:
  - Men marrying later than women.
  - Inheritance of widow (levirate).
  - Increase prestige or household productivity.
  - Infertile wife.



# Plural Marriages

- **Polyandry = one woman + multiple men.**
- Extremely rare, exclusively South Asia
  - Tibet, Nepal, India, Sri Lanka.
  - Adaptation to mobility associated with customary male travel for trade, commerce, military operations.
  - Ensures at least 1 man @home to accomplish male activities.
  - Effective strategy when resources are scarce b/c allows brothers to pool resources
  - Restricts number of wives & heirs, minimizes land fragmentation.
  - Brothers share one wife - fraternal polyandry.



Kundar Singh Pundir, left, and his brother Amar, right, share Indira Devi, center as their wife.



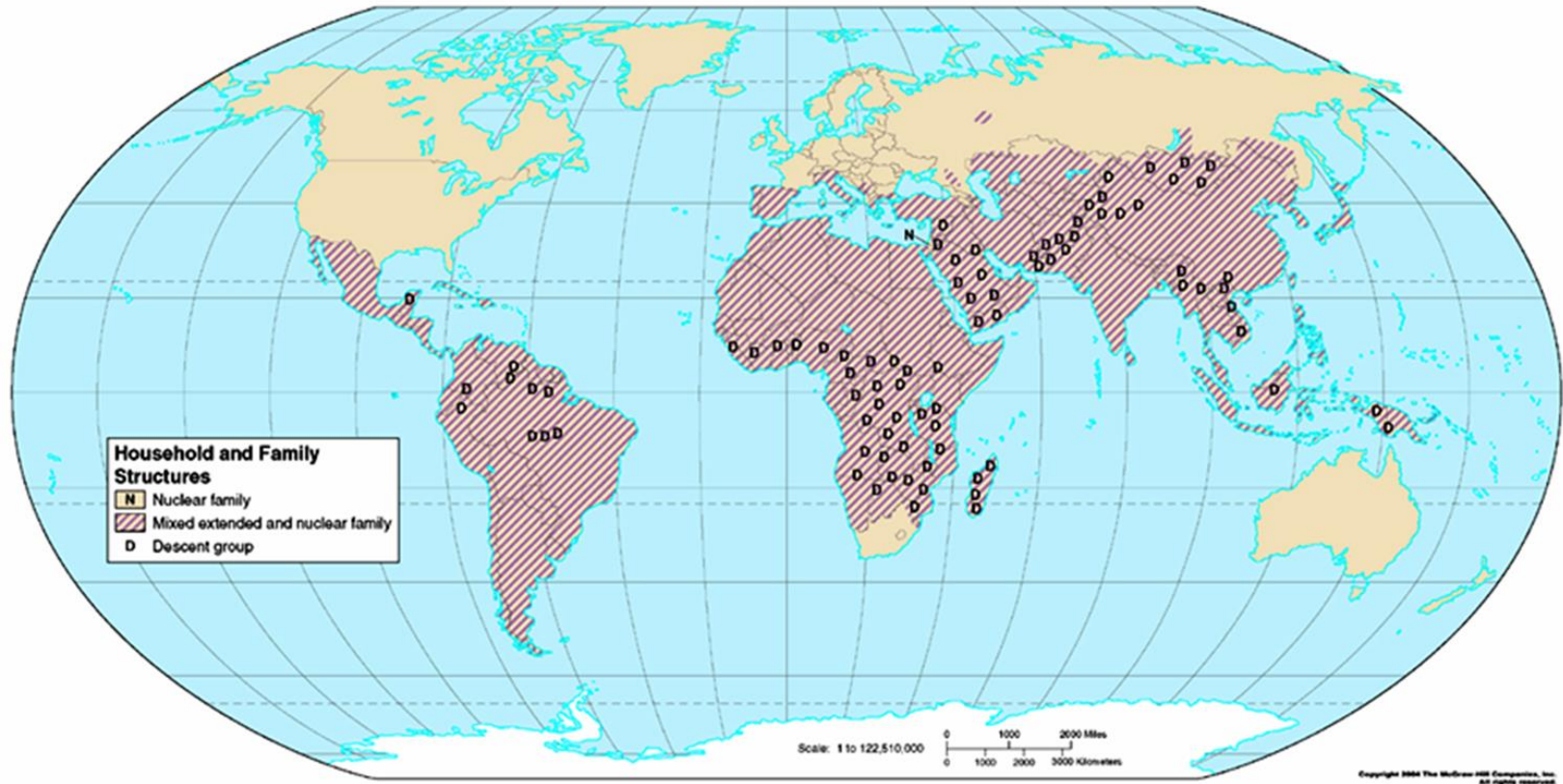


# Families

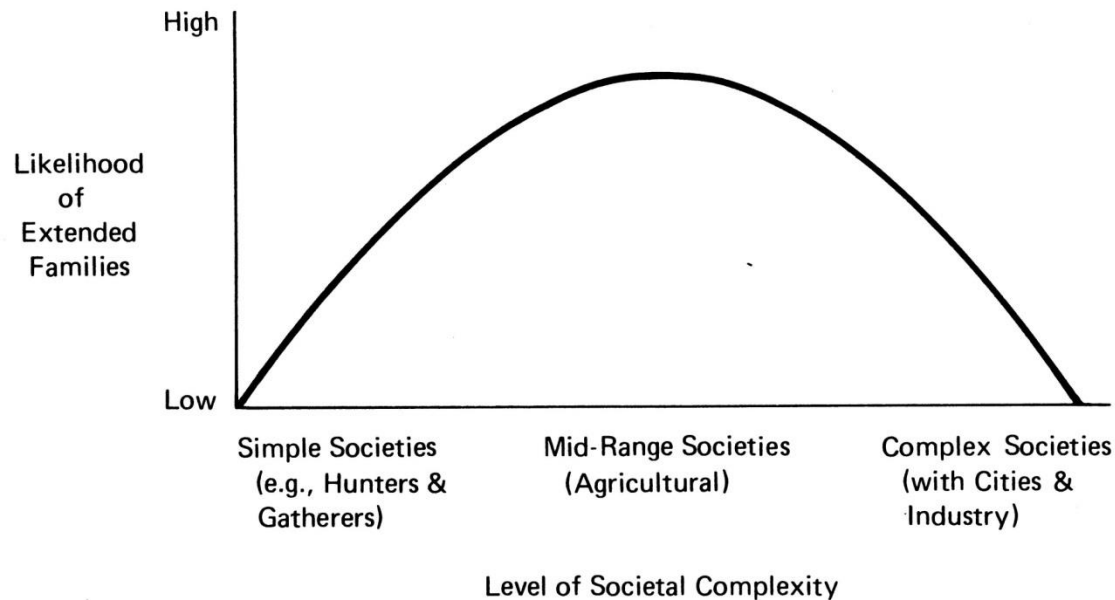
- **Nuclear family** – parents & dependent children.
  - Widespread but not universal
  - In some societies, other social units assume functions of nuclear family.
- **Extended family** – relatives of 3 or more generations.
- Examples:
  - **Zadruga**, extended family among **Muslims of western Bosnia**
    - led by a male household head & his wife
    - couples reside in husband's father's household after marriage.
  - **Tarawad**, extended family among **Nayar caste of southern India**
    - extended families were female centered
    - husband & wife do not live together
    - residential compounds called headed by senior woman.



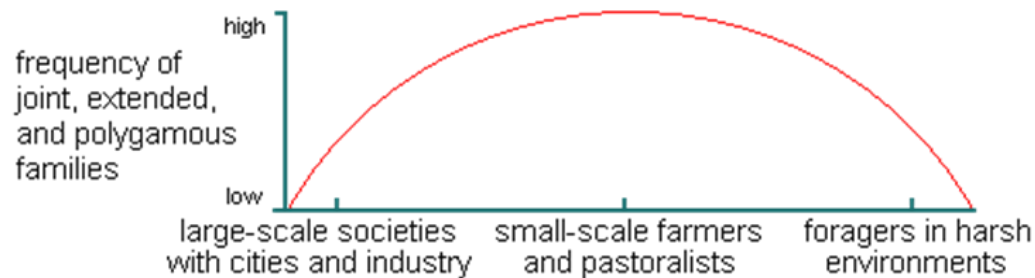
# Household & Family types



# Likelihood of extended families



**Figure 7-1** A Current View of the Relationship Between Extended Families and Level of Societal Complexity



# Sources

- KINSHIP: An Introduction to Descent Systems and Family Organization
- Kinship and Social Organization
- Introduction to Kinship and Social Organization, Burton Pasternak.
- Kin Groups and Social Structure, Roger M. Keesing.
- Not necessarily recommended:
  - Family
  - Marriage
  - Kinship (includes descent)