

To what extent is kinship blood

Choosing to what extent is kinship blood, was interesting to me due to understanding that there is the open question of what we actually consider kinship now. Within my research I will look at both sides of the argument, getting points of alliance and decent theory and whether blood relationships are still considered, bringing the argument throughout my full essay to allow enough understanding of the both, picking up on both examples from our daily life's to examples of ethnographic groups. I want to touch on the idea of blood and social construction, which one is more significant if any at all? Or is it essentially down to us as social communities, us as individuals and what it is we consider to be our own kinship, can we really put a specific meaning on kinship or is there a fine line when it comes to the full definition of the meaning.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary kinship is "the state of having common characteristics or a common origin"¹ it also states that kinship is a "blood relationship"² here we have a complete contradiction of kinship, proving to me that within the instance of me beginning my research, there is already a very unclear definition.

In our own day to day life, it seems that we consider decent theory to be one of the stronger arguments, the decent theory is to define family by blood, to have that biological connection in some way or the other. It seems we can relate to this and mostly understand blood to be the only form of kinship. Something that us as human beings are used to being categorised within. Even though I will add that I think not of everyone the same, but do understand that there is a lot more people who assume by first instance of kinship to be blood, even me myself on first instance would respond by explaining kinship as a blood relation. After checking out some theories it seems there is a lot more ideas of kinship than we perhaps first thought, take the alliance theory its to understand kinship to be more than blood, its to understand social conventions, to understand that we are moving towards different concepts of kinship, at least this is the argument I am here to dig out and investigate. The alliance theory and the decent theory are on both sides of the argument, but essentially mean one matter "family", whether that blood or not its that instant connection.

"Fatherhood and motherhood depend, not on procreation or patriarchy, but on social convention" (Rivers 1924 (1968):52).³

Here I see that Rivers was touching on the idea of alliance theory and that there are other forms of kinship other than it being just based on blood, take our own daily life as an example when a child is fostered, at this present time they are not necessarily considered to be kinship related to the adults in charge, due to it not being permanent, but then to be adopted it becomes an official affair showing that without being blood the parents/parent becomes to kinship to that child. Take social convention as a well used term, this is used to explain how it can be merely based on how societies and the individual persons see kinship and how they choose to use this term. Above is an example of when social convention played a part, taking what we as a society perceive to be the norm of kinship, and challenging the concept of alliance theory. As without even being blood related to this

¹ Murray, AHJ. 1961. The Oxford English Dictionary. Oxford: Clarendon Press

² Murray, AHJ. 1961. The Oxford English Dictionary. Oxford: Clarendon Press

³ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/264275490_What_is_kinship

family at all, the child has become a significant part with in this family. Socially connecting a group of people together, and giving them that family bond, just as strong as being connected through blood.

Unlike alliance theory, where you see rivers picking up on social meanings around kinship, we also have Parkin with the opposite argument of the decent theory as cited by "All human societies have kinship, that is, they all impose some privileged cultural order over the biological universals of sexual relations and continuous human reproduction through birth" (parkin, 2003) ⁴

Parkin states here that there is a certain privilege that comes with a sexual biological relationship, I understand an example of this could be seen when a woman is to give birth to a young one that due to a biological state she has more privilege over that child in appose to a friend for example. I understand where the thought of process has come from here, as it is always considered that to be blood is to be the most important relationship here is a great example of the saying that "blood is thicker than water" but lets touch on the saying blood is thicker than water, Is this really the way in which we work nowadays? What about a broken bond between a child and its parent, that is a relationship that could break, something that they may never come back from, turning them to seek kinship outside of the blood relationship and seeking it in perhaps friends. Even though not blood, the connection between them friends has now become important and to them considered as their family due to having to seek it outside of a broken blood family.

Taking a step away from our own societies I am going to touch a little on the studies of kinship by using an ethnographic example, take the Trobiand islanders as my next example, it is clear to me that they are very much part of the alliance group, take some of their concepts, firstly with when a mother has given birth within the tribe/community other than the father of the child being considered the principle care, the uncle of the child (mothers brother) becomes the head role within their lives, the father doesn't completely leave the child's live, and is still significantly with in their lives, but with not as big of a significance with what the mothers brother plays. Also within the community sex is considered an act as please, and not of procreation, meaning that paternity is not due to the sexual acts. This shows yet another social construct within the Trobiand islanders, making me understand that again there is proof of when kinship was not considered blood.

Unlike the Trobiand islanders, we have the Yanomami that we can see follows the decent theory other than alliance. The people of the same patrilineal with refer to each other as "mash" this meaning your related patricianly. Along with this you see in the work of Chagnon that they see themselves through blood he says "in a word, everyone in the Yanomami society is called by some kinship term that can be translated in what we would call blood related". Here I see that Chagnon is highlighting that the Yanomami use these different names to state decent theory within their society, again this shows me just how much social construction has a massive part to play when it comes to these societies, making me believe that kinship is not just a the sense of being based on blood.

Throughout this research I have discovered a number of different ways in which kinship has been considered both blood and a social convention, where all communities/tribes link themselves to one form of kinship whether that be decent or alliance. What about when you have a complete contradiction within a community where their idea of kinship just doesn't seem to add up, making it clear that perhaps the actual fine line between kinship over laps more than we think.

⁴ Parkin, R. (2003). Kinship. Oxford: Blackwell Publisher.

Take the Nuer as a group of people that could be seen to be contradicting themselves, a community which Evans Prichard shows to have ghost marriages, meaning that if a woman's husband passes away before producing any sons with her, a kinsmen will marry her with the deceased husband's name, meaning when eventually the child is born they take on the name of the dead husband. This clearly shows that biologically the new husband is the child's blood father, the deceased husband is in fact the legal father to the child, Showing that Legalities are more important to this community other than sexual unions. Along with this you also have the same sex marriages with in the Nuer, here you have two women in which partner up, along with this one of the females will ask their husband/male to conceive a child with her wife (female father) again showing that even though the kinsmen is the blood relation to that child, the female father in the same sex marriage is seen as that child's most significant father.

On the flip side with in the Nuer a "man cannot marry a woman of the same clan, or lineage so long as the relationship between the two can be traced back up to 6 generations" this would come under the concept of incest, a massive subject when it comes to the discussion of kinship with anthropologists. With there being the idea with in the Nuer of kinship being based strongly on blood, it begs to question if it really can be completely based on blood after the idea of ghost relationships with in their community. As this does not come under a blood relationship due to the widowers dead husband playing as the father of the child to her new husband.

In summary the extent to which kinship is blood is still an argument in which I strongly believe doesn't necessarily have a definite answer, as you can see throughout my course work I have both pointers on the idea of decent theory and alliance theory both of which have a strong ground about them, I put my essay in a way that I could show an argument from both sides, structured in a way of alliance and then decent following that pattern through out, I choose this as a way of showing my argument so I could use the Nuer as my final argument at the end of my coursework. The contradictions with in the Nuer backs up the conclusion I have come to decide, I personally do not specifically think that we can define kinship to be anything specific, by all accounts it seems where moving in a way in which its based mainly on social conventions, connections and for every group of people, and every culture it is defined in a different way, whilst looking for my evidence on both sides of the argument it was clear to me that it was a lot easier to find proof of the alliance theory, this made me believe that due to the assumption of kinship being blood, there is not a sudden urgency for there to be as much studies of the blood relation. I believe that due to the fine line of kinship that it would be completely ignorant of me to just assume that kinship has just one meaning. In conclusion I understand that blood relations are still very significant but it isn't the definition in what is considered family as much as we possibly first thought, there is a much wider range of definitions and I feel that it is not down to anyone to decide other than the peoples involved and the experiences shared with peoples of all social groups.

Word count 1,932

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