

Contemporary ethnographic studies of kinship challenge the idea that family and descent are defined by biology.

Cross-culturally, the social construction of kinship illustrates considerable diversity.

To understand that society, an ethnographer must investigate such kin ties. For example, local groups may consist of descendants of the same grandfather. These people may live in neighbouring houses, farm adjoining fields, and help each other in everyday tasks. Based on different or more distant kin links, other groups get together less often. One kind of kin group widespread is the nuclear family, consisting of parents and children who usually live together in the same household. Other kin groups include extended families and descent groups. Extended families are those that have three or more generations.

Like race and gender, kinship is culturally constructed. This means some genealogical kin are considered relatives, whereas others may not. It also means that even people who aren't genealogical relatives can be socially recognised as kin. Kinship calculation, or kinship classification, is the system people in a particular society use to identify and categorise kinship relationships. Cultures maintain varied beliefs about biological processes involving kinship, including the role of insemination in creating human life.

People perceive and define kin relations differently in different societies. In any culture, kinship terminology is a classification system, a taxonomy or a typology. It is a native taxonomy developed over generations by the people who live in a particular society. A native classification system is based on how people perceive similarities and differences in the things being classified.

However, among the Muslims of western Bosnia (Lockwood 1975), nuclear families did not exist as independent units. Instead, people resided in a household called a *zadruga*. This extended family was headed by a senior man and his wife, the senior woman. Also living in the *zadruga* were their married sons and their wives and children, as well as unmarried sons and daughters. When a woman wanted to visit another village, she asked permission not from her husband but from the male *zadruga* head. Although men may have felt closer to their own children than to those of their brothers, they were obliged to treat all of the *zadruga*'s children equally. Any adult in the household could discipline a child. When a marriage broke up, children under 7 went with the mother. Older children could choose between their

parents. Children were considered part of the household where they were born, even if their mothers left.

The descent group, by contrast, is the critical kinship group among nonindustrial farmers and herders. Descent groups, remember, are made up of people who share common ancestry— they descend from the same ancestor(s). Lineages and clans are two types of descent groups. Clans tend to be larger than lineages and can include lineages. A lineage is a descent group based on demonstrated descent. ***Unlike lineages, clan members do not show how they descend from their common ancestor; they merely claim, assert, or stipulate their shared ancestry and descent.*** They don't try to specify actual genealogical links generation by generation, as lineage members do. ***A clan, then, is a descent group based on stipulated descent.*** The Betsileo of Madagascar has both lineages and clans. They can demonstrate descent for the most recent 8 to 10 generations.