

**Describe the three kinds of kinship among the Dobe and
how they are intertwined.**

Paul Wren
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The !Kung, or Ju/'hoansi, as they refer to themselves, occupy an area of the Kalahari Desert along the border between Namibia and Botswana. Anthropologist Richard Lee spent extended periods of time living with and studying a group of Ju living in the area around the Dobe water hole.

The Ju/'hoansi number around 450, and all of them seem to be related to each other in some way. Their kinship system appeared straightforward and logical upon Lee's initial exposure, but the more he learned, the more complex and confusing it seemed to be.

He discovered that there were really two systems at work determining kin relationships. These two methods for connecting people are sometimes at odds, and a third method for determining the relationship between two people is used to resolve conflicts created by the first two methods.

Kinship by Lineage

The most obvious component of the Ju/'hoan kinship system is that which is built on lineage. The Ju/'hoansi have kin terms for their blood relatives which are quite similar to those used in the United States. They have terms which parallel ours for father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, son, daughter, uncle, and aunt. It is interesting to note that just as in the U.S., the Ju/'hoansi make no distinction between grandparents or uncles and aunts based on whether their connection is through the mother or the father.

Ju/'hoan kin terms differ for members of the same generation, however. There are distinct terms for older brother and older sister, but only a single term for all younger

siblings, regardless of gender. They also have a much more sophisticated convention for referring to what we simply refer to as "cousins".

The sons and daughters of one's parents' siblings (i.e., cousins), are viewed quite differently depending on their gender, and whether they are senior or junior to the person in question. Male cousins who are older than you would be addressed using the same kin term as a your grandfather, while older female cousins are referred to using the same term used for grandmother. Male and female cousins who are younger are referred to using the same kin terms one would use for grandson and granddaughter, respectively.

Just as there are common terms for grandparents, grandchildren, and cousins, similar kin terms are used for uncles, aunts, nieces, and nephews. In other words, one set of kin terms is used for those in adjacent generations (i.e., the generations of your parents and your children), and another set of kin terms is used for your own generation and those which are two generations away from you (i.e., those of your grandparents and your grandchildren).

This pattern of kin names reflects the more important pattern of how a person interacts with the people in their extended family. In general, the Ju/'hoansi have formal, respectful relationships with family members from adjacent generations (these are called "avoidance" relationships), and enjoy familiar, playful relationships with members of the alternating generations, including their own (these are called "joking" relationships). One exception to this rule is that opposite-sex siblings must adhere to avoidance relationships with one another.

These rules of behavior based on alternating generations govern not only how you act toward all the individuals in your community, but also who may and may not marry.

One cannot marry anyone with whom they have an avoidance relationship, but same-generational members of the opposite sex with whom one has a joking relationship are prime candidates for marriage.

This kinship system is consistent and logical, but was apparently not enough for the Ju/'hoansi. The next section describes how they have muddied the waters considerably by creating additional kin relationships based upon the names people are given.

Kinship by Name

Unlike the U.S., where parents look to books, celebrities, and even the internet when deciding on names for their children, the Ju/'hoansi have very clear rules for how children are named, and what relationships are created by giving them their names.

Children are always named after ancestors (although they are never named after their own parents). First-born sons are named after their father's father, and first-born daughters are named after their father's mother. As more children are born into the family, there is a systematic pattern for naming them. For example, additional sons would be named after the following individuals, if available: mother's father, then all of the father's brothers from oldest to youngest, followed by the mother's brothers from oldest to youngest. Additional daughters are similarly named.

Within the entire Ju/hoan population, there are only about 30 distinct men's names in use, and about 30 women's names. Some are more popular than others, but most people can expect a dozen or so other people to have the same name. While this naming system could be just an interesting situation, it is actually much more. A young boy

named Kashe, for example, is automatically related to all other men and boys named Kashe. They all claim to be descended from some original man named Kashe, as well. But that's not all-- the new Kashe instantly shares the same relationships with the relatives of all the other Kashes that they do. For example, anyone whose father's name is Kashe will also refer to the new Kashe with the kin term for "father."

This separate system for establishing kinship causes a few fundamental problems when laid on top of the first kinship system. First, it can alter what was once a joking relationship, making it an avoidance one. Let us consider the case where a girl is named for her father's sister. Since they have the same name, her aunt's mother (actually the girl's grandmother) will now be seen as the girl's "mother," changing the familiar joking relationship she should have had with her biological grandmother into a formal avoidance one, since she is compelled to address the older woman as "mother." It is important to note that the grandmother would now also refer to her biological granddaughter using the kin term for "daughter."

The name-based kinship system introduces a second difficulty when combined with the lineage-based one. A person cannot marry anyone with the same name as their same-sex parent or sibling. So, if a girl's father's name is a rather popular one such as K"au (in 1964 there were 24 men named K"au), that could significantly reduce the number of available men to marry. It gets even worse if she has three or four brothers who also have popular names.

There is another side effect caused by the name-based system: Two people can be caught in the middle, with one seeing the other as a joking relative, but the other seeing them as an avoidance relative. This could happen in a case where a young man and

woman would otherwise be in a joking relationship, yet because his name is the same as her father's brother, she would call the young man "uncle" and see him as an avoidance relationship.

Resolution by Wi

It seems that throwing these two systems together would end in disaster, but a third scheme comes to the rescue. Between any two individuals where the seniority of the elder is clear, the senior person gets to decide what the nature of their relationship will be. Will it be one of avoidance or joking? It is entirely up to the elder of the two people. To make such a decision about a younger relative is to "wi." The right to "wi" one's junior is one of the few ways in which the Ju attain status within the community. It is also a method for resolving problematic relations which result from the first two kinship systems.