

## A Sampling of Social Structure (412/812) Student Abstracts

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### **The Japanese Family: An Analysis of Structure, Kinship Terminology, and Historical Significance**

The significance of the Japanese family in contemporary and pre-modern Japan is one of foremost importance. The strong socio-cultural fabric of Japanese society is rooted in kin associations dating far before even the Meiji Restoration. Western scholars of Japan and other East Asian societies find that many bureaucratic and economic principles lie in rooted family traditions. Japan is a country that is torn between traditional values and the lure of western principles. The family unit in Japan has changed significantly within the last hundred years or so. Many of the changes were the direct result of forced westernization and adaptation of the latter's ideals. Today, many areas of Japan are characterized by a polarization in family structure. It tends to be most highlighted between the urban and rural areas. Once a common practice, the extended family has slowly declined and with greater financial independence came the nuclear family. The interaction among family members has changed and with it, kinship terms. Once rooted in humility and reverence for seniority, kin terminology has reflected these changes. I then look into the Japanese family from a historical perspective. It's evolution and significance in present Japan.

### **Incest in the Israeli Kibbutzim: Substantiation of the Westermarck Hypothesis**

In the Israeli Kibbutzim, children are raised communally in groups consisting of 8-15 other children who are within the same age range. Typically, this means children are raised with other, non-biologically related children. Daily activities such as eating, bathing, playing, and sleeping, are performed with other fellow group members. Despite this atmosphere of sexual freedom, by their mid-teens, the girls, especially, displayed signs of shame and became hostile towards the boys, to the point of insisting on having unisex showers and same-sex sleeping arrangements. Later on, research displays no single reported incident of sexual intercourse in the Kibbutz. Based on Joseph Shepher's study and investigation on sexual relations between members of the Kibbutz, this paper aims to demonstrate the Kibbutz as evidence supporting Edvard Westermarck's hypothesis that children reared in close physical proximity during early childhood develop a sexual aversion toward one another later in adulthood and that human nature was designed with an integrated mechanism to bring about the development of sibling incest avoidance. Other sources intended for reference in this paper will include Freud and his Oedipus complex hypothesis as well as Melford Spiro's inbreeding aversion and co-residency. On the whole, the paper will identify the "complex interplay of nature and nurture behind the dramas of love and loathing" demonstrated in the Kibbutz.

### **Kristen Rodgers**

### **Does Altruism Exist? An Examination at Kin-based and Reciprocal Altruism**

Although there appears to be a cross-cultural ideal for the existence of altruism, whether or not it exists remains a contentious issue for researchers today. Altruism, defined as any behavior which reduces an

individual's chances of survival and reproduction while increasing another's chances of survival and reproduction, may not exist in the perfect form, but it is commonly seen as an effective survival strategy in reciprocal altruism, or engaging in any behavior which reduces an individual's chances of survival and reproduction while increasing another's with the expectation that at some point in the future, the behavior will be reciprocated when it is needed, although there is no guarantee of actually receiving it. More commonly, acts that are deemed altruistic can be viewed between members of kin groups because of potentially higher payoffs. One theory states that an individual will more helpful or altruistic to kin in proportion to the degree of relatedness, but that does not explain why reciprocal altruism is seen in non-kin relationships based on cooperation. The tentative focus of this paper is to examine how reciprocal altruism therefore emerges in a species inherently designed by natural selection to be selfish and the costs and benefits of engaging in such practices for all involved. Specifically, this paper will focus on food exchange between members of a kin group and between non-kin members within a village and in the allocation of resources to sick relatives.

### **What's Love Got to Do With It? Factors Influencing Marital Stability in Post-Industrial Societies**

Romantic love is most commonly associated with autonomous mate selection; but, it is not considered a universal basis for marriage. In fact, studies show that romantic love only serves as a binding mechanism in marriages that are not subsistence dependent. However, in comparison to subsistence based relationships, marriages contracted in post-industrial societies for romantic purposes tend to be more fragile and easily disrupted. Since most marriages in post-industrial societies are not arranged and are commonly chosen autonomously for "love," what are the most critical factors that stabilize or disrupt such relationships? While individual choice can never be erased from the conjugal equation, research confirms that certain factors strongly influence marital stability in post-industrial societies, such as: employment, division of labor, reproduction, children, education, violence, fidelity, socio-economic status, and religiosity.

### **MHC and Mate Choice: The Biology Behind Attraction**

Over the past two decades, ground breaking research has led to a better understanding of the biology behind mate choice. By studying the major histocompatibility complex, otherwise known as the MHC genes, researchers have begun to better solve the puzzle of when and why humans cross culturally choose to mate either assortatively or disassortatively. Although disassortative mating often proves to be beneficial to offspring due to the genetic dissimilarity between parents (thus avoiding both the detrimental effects of inbreeding and providing more disease resistant characteristics to the young), assortative mating still proves to be desirable on occasion. It is my intent to examine the most recent data regarding the major histocompatibility complex in order to better understand what motivates an individual to choose a mate either for their genetic similarities or their dissimilarities. It will be necessary to examine the conditions under which either approach occurs, and how often the concept of female choice plays a role in these mating decisions. This idea will be greatly discussed when the topic of how MHC genetic cues are ascertained and rated by the individual is examined within the analysis. Although we are often unaware of it, our bodies are constantly picking up signals about the opposite sex that allow us to size up the viability of a potential mate. Our growing knowledge of this process has led to a

better understanding of our genetic evolution and our ability to predict the biological compatibility of any two individuals. Finally, it will be highly relevant to the analysis to gather any available research documenting the health and survivorship of the resulting offspring from both types of mating scenarios. Matings between parents that are genetically too similar account for many of the patients today attending fertility clinics. The association between MHC genes and the ability (or inability) to conceive successfully will also play a strong role in my final analysis paper.

### **Gender Status in Hunting and Gathering Societies**

In attempting to examine the causes of variations in the status of women within societies worldwide it is important to examine their role in the economic structure of the society. The role women play in the economic structure of hunting and gathering societies varies significantly from culture to culture. And as Korotayev and Cardinale relate, “contrary to the current prevalent view, female contribution should be regarded as a significant positive predictor of some important dimensions of female status.” The purpose of this paper is to cross-culturally examine female status in hunting and gathering societies which exhibit varying levels and manners of hunting and gathering subsistence behavior. The paper will in turn examine how women’s subsistence roles may influence their status within these societies. The paper will attempt to examine how the level of hunting and gathering practiced within a society, the type of hunting and gathering that is taking place, and the female contribution affects the status of women within these societies. Within this context, age and possible changes in contributive behavior of a woman will be taken into account in order to gain a clearer view on the effects of female contribution in relations to status.

### **Religion and Marriage in North America**

Historically marriage has been a religious union steeped in traditional and historical beliefs and practices. When choosing a marriage partner a number of different factors are present affecting mate selection, religion being one of these factors. The following paper will look into the relationship between religion and the selection process of finding a marriage partner. The paper will look specifically at Christianity, the main religion in our region of the world, and discuss how large of an affect religion is in finding and selecting a mate. First, the paper will look at whether individuals marry cross-religiously (different religions) and then specifically examine the patterns of Christians of the United States as well as how and what Catholicism/Protestantism traditions affect the mate selection process. I will also look to see if individuals tend to marry endogamously within their own denominations or traditional religious sub-groups (diocese, etc.).

### **Body Modification and Mate Attraction**

While the understanding of physical attractiveness has been explained by various biological characteristics, purposeful body modification also plays a critical role in attracting a mate. Adaptations of physical characteristics often demonstrate valuable qualities in mate selection. These adoptions of appealing characteristics may signal mate readiness or are designed to attractive the attention of potential mates. The purpose of this paper is to examine instances of body modification in select world

cultures and the role these purposely alterations play in mate selection, as well as survey various theories regarding the phenomena. In discussing body modification, I will look to several forms of alteration including more traditional forms, such as tattooing and scarification, in addition to more contemporary modifications, as in cosmetic surgery.

### **A comparison of the Cheyenne, the Hidatsa, and the Navaho berdache: Social roles in relation to the berdache's general welfare**

Berdache encompasses varying accounts of gender roles among Native American tribes in North America. They are greatly associated with transvestism, but the berdache role itself is much more complicated than their attire. Some tribes honor and respect the berdache while others show contempt. Why is there such variation between the attitudes towards berdaches? Although information on the berdache is scarce, I am researching the type of familial, religious and militaristic activities the North American berdache is allowed, or expected, to participate in. By analyzing their roles and their significance to the society, we can gain perspective how the berdache was viewed and where he might have been ranked among to others in his community. For example, how did they compare to non-Berdache individuals of the same or different biological sex, like in relation to a war deserter or a post-menopausal woman in the Holy Women society. I plan on to compare the Cheyenne, the Hidatsa, and the Navaho tribes, based on the amount of information I have been able to find, to answer the following questions: What type of attitudes toward berdaches has been reported; were they accepted in their society; and did berdaches hold any formal positions?

### **A Comparison of Parental Investment in Adopted and Biological Children**

Abstract In the United States many couples are faced with the possibility of never producing their own children through conventional biological methods. For many of these couples, the answer is adoption. Often, however, the couple eventually conceives a child biologically and the family becomes blended with one adopted child and one biological child. According to the wide belief that gene preservation motivates parental care, it could be assumed that the adopted child would receive less parental investment with the introduction of a biological child. In order to test this assumption, this paper takes into consideration the living conditions, health, and education of not only adopted and biological, but also step children. If studies show that the theory is true, the placement of step children in between adopted and biological children in terms of parental care would add further credibility to this paper's proposal. Therefore, step children cannot be dismissed in the research. Data will be gathered from a variety of journals containing articles on the subject. By combining the findings of multiple studies detailed in articles such as: "Children in Families: Characteristics of Biological, Step-, and Adopted Children" and "Adoption, Family Ideology, and Social Stigma: Bias in Community Attitudes, Adoption Research and Practice".