MODULE GUIDE:
AI 1121  THE POLITICS OF SEX AND KINSHIP

Wednesdays 9.00 – 12.00 pm. EB 2.46

Module leader: Chris Knight. Office hours: Wednesdays 2-3. Chris.Knight@uel.ac.uk

Is sexual jealousy inevitable? Is the human male a “naked ape”? How many parents has a Navaho child? Is a woman’s place the home? What features of kinship in modern London might shock an Aboriginal Australian? Why do so many hunter-gatherers view animal species as kin? Why is the population in Europe starting to decline? In European fairy tales, why does the hero so often settle in the kingdom of his bride?

This course offers an introduction to the study of kinship and marriage. We will explore monkey and ape sexual politics. We will study cross-cultural diversity in systems of human kinship and explore how these change over time. We will ask what kinship is, and examine the difference between genetic relatedness and culturally constructed kinship. Hunter-gatherer societies are self-organised, and kinship is the secret of their success. An understanding of the course readings will help make sense of the family, marriage, gender and society ranging from the prehistoric past to the present and possible future.


Assessment: 30 (weekly summaries) / 40 (essay) / 30 (exam)

30 per cent for summaries using the standard template. Summaries are time-sensitive: they must be submitted weekly on the day you arrive for each lecture or they will not be marked. This policy will be strictly enforced, because successful workshops depend on everyone being familiar with the readings and providing summaries for oral presentation. You are asked to submit eight summaries; the final mark entered will be an average of your best five.

40 per cent for the essay. Word length: 2,500 – 3,000. Essay title:

EITHER: ‘Was early human kinship matrilineal?’ [Review the debate, give your verdict and explain why it matters] OR ‘Woman’s Place is the Home. Discuss’. [Remember to consider what factors might influence whether ‘home’ is a powerful place to be]. Provide full bibliographical referencing throughout, Harvard style. If you don’t know what this means, please check before proceeding any further. Essay deadline: Wednesday May 14th, 2008. The essay must be strictly anthropological and make full use of the SET course readings, especially those about kinship, residence and descent. Don’t rely on internet examples or references.

30 per cent for the exam.

Additional readings can be found here:
http://homepages.uel.ac.uk/C.Knight/courserefs.htm
http://www.radicalanthropologygroup.org/class_texts.htm
Week 1 (February 6)
2. Workshop: A matrilineal long-house: brothel or temple?
4. Written work for next week (1-2 pages): Evaluating the ‘mating effort’ theory. How could such a system work? Write up the outcome of your workshop discussions.

Week 2 (February 13)
1. Lecture: Classificatory kinship terminology.
2. Workshop: Early Human Kinship

Week 3 (February 20)
1. Lecture: The history of kinship theory. The ideology of the family.
2. Workshop: Why confuse paternity?

Week 4 (February 27)
- Lecture: Early Human Kinship Was Matrilineal.
- Workshop: Must gender be disempowering for women?
- Summary for next week (using template): Ortner, S. B. Is female to male as nature is to culture? In M. Z. Rosaldo & L. Lamphere (eds), Woman, Culture and Society.
Week 5 (March 5).

1. Lecture: Partible paternity.
2. Workshop: Costs and benefits of free love.

Easter break

Week 6 (April 9)

1. Lecture: The myth of primitive matriarchy.
2. Workshop: The sweatlodge. Feedback from Wales field trip.

Week 7 (April 16)

1. Lecture: Decoding myths and fairy tales.
2. Workshop: The wives of the sun and moon.
**Week 8 (April 23)**

1. Lecture: The matrilineal puzzle.
2. Workshop: The brothel model revisited.

**Week 9 (April 30)**

1. Lecture: The grandmother hypothesis

**Week 10 (May 7)**

1. Finishing your essay. Exam revision.
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