KINSHIP LANGUAGE CHARTING

"The family is man's most basic, most vital, and most influential institution. It is the foundation of society, the molder of character and personality, and the mentor of cultural value… It is where he leans the values that will influence his behavior all his life as he deals wit the greater society. And it is where one acquires his self-image and his goals and his ideas of what he himself will someday seek in the way of a spouse and a home." Holmes 1971:358

The kinship system determines the make-up of the family, how new members join through birth, adoption or marriage, how the children are brought up and how inheritance of property or position is regulated. Charting kinship relations is a first step to learning what is the family, who is in it, how it functions, and how its members are named and referred to .

Start by (1) asking your informant about their nuclear family, and limit your discussion to simple terms for father, mother, child, husband, wife. (2) Then learn about several kinds of kin relationships:

Consanguineal — related by "blood", *i.e.*, genetics: parents, grandparents, siblings, children.
Affinal — relationship through marriage: spouses, in-laws, spouses of siblings.
Fictive — relationships which are neither consanguineal nor affinal. These "fictions" may have same names as those, and can be socially important, as an adopted child.
Ritual — linked through ceremonial ties, such as blood brothers, godparents. This is a special type of fictive kin.

A kinship chart is built around a single reference person called **ego**. Family members are charted from left to right in order of birth. The father's family is usually placed to the left of ego, and the mother's to the right. Names appear under symbol, relationship term under a name.

Symbols:		
male	△	
female	○	
gender unknown	☐	
consanguineal	┴	
multiple births	⋀	
affinal (marrital) tie	═	
ego	▲	●
fictive & ritual kin	··········	
deceased	⬓	⊘
marriage ended	≠	
unmarried mate	△≈○	
multiple mates	△═○═○	

Assignment

Using standard kinship symbols:

<u>First</u>

1. Draw your own kinship chart, starting with yourself as "Ego". Include some of both your parents families. If you are married, then include some of your spouse's family.

2. Find what are the common terms used for each of Ego's kin.

3. Write the name each kin that you can recall. What naming patterns do you see, if any?

4. Which kin are in conflict? For what causes? What conflictual patterns do you see, if any?

5. Who can inherit from whom? What inheritance patterns do you see, if any?

6. Who will consult with whom in important family decisions? What decisionary patterns do you see, if any?

7. Remember to show fictive and ritual relationships.

<u>Second</u>

Do the same with a local friend or informant using the kinship terms of the local language.

<u>Third</u>

"Test the common assumption that terms equating individuals reflect behavioral equivalences, and that terms differentiating individuals reflect behavioral differences."[*]

[*] Julia Crante and Michael V. Angrosino, *Field Projects in Anthropology*, 3d ed (Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 1992), 51