“Spiritual Kinship”, Need-Based Transfers, and the Evolution of Cooperation

Hillary L. Lenfesty1, AthenA Aktips1,2, Lee Cronk3
1. Dept. of Psychology, Arizona State University; 2. Center for Evolution and Cancer, UCSF; 3. Dept. of Anthropology, Rutgers University

1 INTRODUCTION
Do humans generalize kinship concepts in ways that help to manage risk especially in unpredictable ecologies? “Spiritual Kinship” may enhance need-based transfers and help individuals pool risk under such circumstances. We define spiritual kinship as a concern for the welfare of another that emerges from proximate ecological factors, such as fitness interdependence and a sense of shared fate. It is instantiated by cultural mechanisms such as kinship terminology (e.g., fictive kinship) and rituals that take on a religious or spiritual character, like those which establish godparent or Maasai “osotua” relationships. The establishment of such relationships may result in intrinsic (rather than instrumental) valuation of social partners, thus allowing individuals to overcome commitment barriers by attuning their concern to others’ need and prompting risk-pooling through need-based transfers. Spiritual kinship may enable a form of social insurance that helps individuals and groups survive when ecological conditions are unpredictable.

2 THE EVOLUTION OF SACRED RELATIONSHIPS

Problem: Volatile environments
Solution: Risk-pooling through Need-Based Transfers (NBT)

Problem: Credible commitments in NBTs
Solution: “Spiritual kinship” relationships as a commitment device

Kin language, rituals, emotions, attachment

3 KINSHIP TERMS ACROSS THE DISCIPLINES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Established How</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>Kinship as Kin Selection/Inclusive Fitness</td>
<td>An evolutionary strategy that favors the reproductive success of an organism’s relatives, even at a cost to the organism’s own survival and reproduction (Hamilton, 1964; Maynard-Smith, 1964; Wright, 1931)</td>
<td>Genetic relatedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relatedness</td>
<td>Likelihood of heritability of traits given the distribution of gene frequencies among populations (Haldane 1932/1990).</td>
<td>Natural selection, mutation, genetic drift, and migration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthropology</td>
<td>Affinal Kinship</td>
<td>A relative by marriage or relationship by marriage ties (Keesing, 1975).</td>
<td>Marriage to one’s spouse or the relationship between corporate groups linked by marriage between their members (Keesing, 1975).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consanguinous Kinship</td>
<td>“A relative by birth, (i.e., a ‘blood relative’)” (Keesing, 1975).</td>
<td>One or more instances of sexual reproduction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fictive Kinship</td>
<td>A relationship modeled on relationships of kinship, but created by customary convention rather than circumstances of birth (Keesing, 1975).</td>
<td>Friendships, fraternal orders, mafia and gang relationships, co-residency, “phenotypic matching”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Psychological Kinship</td>
<td>A result of those who feel “fused” with their group members; fusion predicts willingness to incur high costs to self on behalf of group (Whitehouse et al., 2014; Whitehouse &amp; Lamman, 2014)</td>
<td>Dysphoric rituals that leads to “identity fusion”. Traumatic or euphoric experiences, such as warfare, natural disasters, sports victories, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>Legal Kinship</td>
<td>Relationships determining political succession or inheritance</td>
<td>Consanguinity or adoption (e.g., ancient Roman practice of Adoption–Jussen, 2000)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 SPIRITUAL KINSHIP

Spiritual kinship relationships are social insurance relationships characterized by NBTs and are religious, spiritual, or sacred nature. They entail a concern for the welfare of and intrinsic (rather than instrumental) valuation of social partners. This promotes a genuine concern for the needy person’s well-being, without expectation of repayment in kind.

Godparenting is a form of spiritual kinship in the Catholic Church that has existed for almost 2,000 years. Godparents are co-parents who are responsible alongside the natural parents for the well-being of the baptized child. Co-parents or “compadres” also frequently give resources to the natural parents in times of need. And in Latin America, compadres may be established for other purposes, such as trading cattle (Paul, 1942).

Maasai Osotua relationships are sacred relationships that cannot be broken and can even be passed down through generations. Osotua literally means “umbilical cord”. In osotua relationships, individuals ask for resources when they are in need, and give to others according to their ability when asked. Within osotua, resources transferred will not necessarily balance out over time; transfers do not create debt and are not considered payments.

References

Acknowledgements
This work is funded by the John Templeton Foundation grant “Generosity By Nature: Need-Based Transfers and the Origins of Human Cooperation” and the National Science Foundation, Office of Federal Coordinating Committee for Science, Engineering, and Technology, Grant #0830499. The authors would like to acknowledge the support of the Maricopa County Community College District and the Center for Human Evolutionary Studies at Rutgers University for helpful feedback.