

Crow Indian Matrilineal Kinship and Social Organization

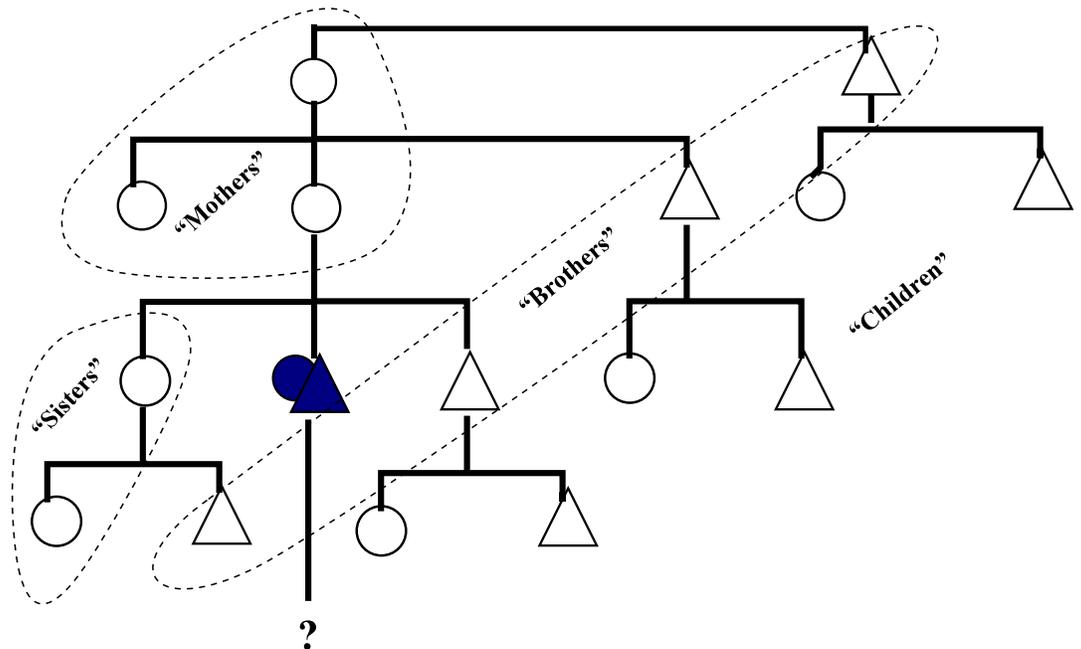
Coyote and Origin of *Ashammaleaxia* = “As Driftwood Lodges” – the Clans (originally 13 matrilineal clans; today 8 clans remain viable and active) With structural similarities (though not identical) with such American Indian tribes as the Hopi, Iroquois, Navajo, and Tlingit.

Matrilineal descent is based upon tracing affiliation along the **mother-to-daughter line**, i.e., all consanguineal (blood) relations (male and female) are so related (as opposed to patrilineal descent which tracing affiliation along the father-to-son line).

There are many roles performed by the **clan**, including named entities, exogamy, communal ownership and inheritance, cooperation, and identity, all marked by tremendous intensity of relationship and of solidarity. Names include: “No Mixed Clan,” “Whistle Water Clan,” “Bad War Deeds Clan.”

To comprehend the kinship behaviors you must grasp the principle behind the clan system. The **matrilineal principle** is based upon the dual concerns for **cooperation** among selected kinsmen and **succession** of authority, membership and property, all of which is accomplished by the structural creation of kinship terminology based upon the principles of “**cross generational equivalence**” and “**bifurcate merging**”, e.g., all the males within the matrilineal clan are addressed as “brothers” (i.e., differentiated only by an “older” or “young” brother

designation) and all the offspring of those brothers are addressed as “children,” regardless of generational link with one another. Likewise, all women of one’s mother’s clan are addressed either



as “mothers,” regardless of generation link with one another (i.e., mother, mother’s sisters, grandmother, grandmother’s sisters, etc.), or as “sisters,” (i.e., one’s sisters, or daughters of one’s mothers of your generation). The “brothers” and the “mothers-sisters” are thus the key cooperative and succession units. For a male, if all the offspring of the mother’s brother’s are called “children,” then what is the reciprocal, i.e., what does that “child” call his father’s brothers? – “fathers.” The logic is extended throughout the entire kinship network.

The challenge is to keep the loyalty of the men of the clan, as they have **divided interests**, i.e., for his own children and the love for his wife, yet his clan support and responsibilities. Keep in mind that for a husband/father, his children do not belong to his own clan, but to his wife’s clan. He must also look after his sister’s children, to guide and pass on clan duties, as they represent the future of his clan.

Key Kinsmen and their Behavioral Roles (a partial listing)

(B=brother Z=sister M=mother F=father C=child D=daughter S=son)

1. Biikga = elder brother (identity and strong cooperative and support relationship)

(+ B, M + B, M M B, M M M B)

Matsuka = younger brother (cooperative and support relationship)

(for male or female - B, M - B, Z S, Z D S, for female D S, D D S)

Bakupe = sister (cooperative and support relationship; brother/sisters division of labor thus modified)

(si or immediate female siblings and other close females of clan of own generation)

2. Masaka = mother (support, love, identity, inheritance)

(M, M Z, M M)

3. Biilapxe = father or “clan uncle”

(story of “**Four Brothers**” – for all fa other than biological father – in matrilineal system, all male members of your father’s mother’s clan, regardless of age, are addressed as *biilápxe* (translated as “father”) or in English, “clan uncles.” Then, in turn, they call you, “son or “daughter.” F, F B, F M B, F Z S, F Z D S)

Isbaxia = aunt or “clan aunt” (F Z, F M, F Z D, F Z D D)

– both the biilapxe and isbaxia relationships are based upon **reciprocity**: respect and give away / praise, prayer and protections

a. “**respect**” toward – “like medicine” – always show difference and respect and never joke

- in passing at a store, give \$5 and have a something good to eat or more formally
- at every giveaway held at birthdays, graduation, return from military service, elected to tribal council, etc, primary recipients of “gifts” – pendleton blankets and shawls, horses, money, food

b. **praise, prayer and protection from**

- praise – “your pr men” – select among many most respected and at public event (pow wow, council meeting, basketball game, etc), sing praise songs as you follow
 - people do not speak for selves – “boast”
 - as he is respected and speaks of you, you are acknowledged
 - and reiterate that we do no achieve deeds alone without help of others
- prayer – mediate on your behalf with requests to Creator and Medicine Fathers at every time pray (meal, sweat, Mass, Sundance, etc.)
- protection – wise advise, monetary support

Thus, as part of the rites of passage, all changes to one’s **status** acquired and publically acknowledged via one’s *biilápxe*

4. **“Teasing Cousin”** = (F B C, i.e., father’s clan members of the same generation as you; joking relationship)

5. **Wives of Brothers** (given practice of sororate; close to)

6. **Parent-in-law** (strict taboo relationship given conflict of interests between a in-marrying husband and the authority of the wife and her mother over their children)

7. **Husband and Wife** (a loving relationship, but divided loyalties and hence of secondary importance)