

## Group Nepotism and Human Kinship

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### Abstract

The human aptitude for collective action may have implications for how the theory of kin selection applies to human kinship. Several models show that if two or more individuals act collectively in assisting their mutual kin, their effective coefficient of relatedness can be greater than if each acts individually. Thus human beings may have psychological not only for individual nepotism but also for group nepotism adaptations leading them to construct solidary groups enforcing an ethic of unidirectional altruism toward kin. Human kinship systems have a number of features that seem especially consistent with group nepotism: (1) Human kin groups come in many sizes, ranging from families to clans, lineages, and tribes of thousands of people. (2) Human kinship commonly features an "axiom of amity," a presumption that kin are entitled to aid simply by virtue of being kin. But this kin altruism is often socially imposed, motivated less by affection between donors and recipients than by social pressure. (3) Relatedness as defined by human kinship systems often differs systematically from biological relatedness and varies with social structure -- especially with the solidarity of the kin group. The theory of group nepotism may have implications for a of research areas in the social sciences. I conclude by focusing on two: demand sharing of food among subsistence hunters and the psychology of ethnocentrism.