Mac Marshall, ed., *Siblingship in Oceania: Studies in the Meaning of Kin
Relations.* Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania
Monograph No. 8. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press,
1981. Pp. 421, figures, tables, references, list of contributors. $32.75.

Whatever one may think of the kinship theory set forth in this book,
the volume contributors have made a concerted effort to focus ethnogra-
phic and analytical attention upon the special importance of sibling rela-
tionships in a variety of Pacific cultures.

Much of Chapter 1 is devoted to a discussion of the contrasts between
the "extensionist" and the "cultural category" approaches to the study of
kinship. The first of these assumes that human relationships are founded
upon the universal recognition of biological affinities between parents
and children. Anthropologists who subscribe to this approach find no dif-
ficulty in saying that kinship relationships and terminologies can be de-
scribed and analyzed with reference to both genealogies and the linguistic
labels used to classify persons variously identified as relatives or non-rela-
tives. The cultural category approach presumes that people in different

cultures operate with categories of contextual meaning that may or may not parallel the conceptual categories commonly used by anthropologists. The two approaches, as many of the volume contributors inadvertently demonstrate, are in reality not dichotomous.

John Kirkpatrick's description of Marquesan siblingship (Chapter 2) and Julia Flecht's analysis of the cultural contexts of siblingship in Puka-puka (Chapter 3) together serve to illustrate how the cultural category approach may lead to the excessive use of local terms or, worse, the coin-ing of such neologisms as, for example, "consociate," "cognized social or-der," "field of cognized action," or "biogenetic kin."

Judith Huntsman (Chapter 4) begins the analysis of Tokelauan sibling relationships with a brief discussion of kinship terms and usages. This is followed by descriptions of how siblingship is both portrayed in folktales and idealized in the public orations of village elders. She extends the anal-ysis to data on proprietorship (siblings have interests in exactly the same realty) and, finally, discusses how the obligations of sibling reciprocity and altruism seem even to endure among Tokelauan migrants to New Zealand.

Richard Feinberg's essay on Anutan kinship (Chapter 5) shows how ei-ther genealogical or behavioral features may be used to qualify a person for kinship status. Such status, incidentally, is mandatory on Anuta Island since anyone outside the kinship system is either viewed with suspicion or treated as an outright enemy. It would seem, therefore, that anthropologi-cal kinship theorists from either persuasion could independently draw the same conclusions from Feinberg's presentation of the Anutan data. While this says something interesting about the principles of Anutan social or-ganization, it also reflects favorably upon Feinberg's skills as an ethnographer.

Although Bernd Lambert confines his study of Gilbertese (Kiribati) sibling relationships to Butaritari and Makin Islands (Chapter 6) his gener-alizations apply equally well to other Gilbert Islands. The Gilbertese unambiguously define siblings in terms of precise genealogical relation-ships. Schneider's comments (pp. 399–400) about Lambert's list of kinship terms are immaterial. Gilbertese siblings share similar interests in parental estates (like the Tokelauans) and they often reside together on the same estate.

Mac Marshall (Chapter 7) and DeVerne Reed Smith (Chapter 8) dis-cuss siblingship in Trukese and Palauan cultures, respectively. Both cul-tures are organized around matrilineal descent groups. Marshall points out how sibling-set marriages, together with both levirate and sororate types of secondary marriage, reduce the stress produced by the inherent

conflicts between matrilineal descent group membership and the mainte-
nance of strong ties between husband and wife. Smith also concludes that
cross-sibling sets help to stabilize social relationships between members of
different matrilineal descent groups.

Many of the pedantic arguments about the significance of descent
principles versus siblingship dissolve in the unique logic of the Kaulong of
New Britain. As described by Jane Goodale in Chapter 9, the Kaulong
have institutionalized widow strangulation to a point where reluctance to
carry out the act by the woman's brothers is viewed as the failure to per-
form a social duty. Although the logic is both novel and complex, it is evi-
dent from the data that widow strangulation automatically confers par-
enthood status upon the surviving sibling. In this way the Kaulong child
receives his or her social identity from a set of cross-siblings.

The sibling theme is muted in Robert Rubinstein's discussion of Malo
culture (Chapter 10). The data show how the predominance of Malo men
in all social and political relationships place both women and siblings
backstage.

Although Robert McKinley (Chapter 11) has gone to great lengths to
explore different theoretical problems, he does not bother to inform the
reader about the location, size, or any other characteristics of the popu-
lation from which the data were collected. It seems insufficient to simply
refer to the study population as "Malay" when, in fact, the author has
made an earnest effort both to link theoretical problems with ethno-
graphic data and to test some of his hypotheses with quantitative data.
Despite the omission of some customary ethnographic facts, it must be
said that McKinley makes good use of case materials to define different
kinds of sibling interaction.

While David Schneider himself may decline to be contextually de-
fined as one of the principal architects of "the contextual approach," his
concluding and critical comments deserve careful study. He perceives
many shortcomings in the various chapters but attributes these to the
broad scope of the holistic study of culture. He neglects to consider, as do
most of the individual authors, that the contextual approach to siblingship
must be linked to an explicit methodology if the results are to be viewed
as either reliable or valid. Readers must, therefore, be content to share
Schneider's feelings that one emerges from reading this volume aestheti-
cally illuminated, enlightened, and informed (p. 395).

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