**Filiation** is the legal termfor the recognized legal status of the relationship between family members, or more specifically the legal relationship between parent and child especially a father and child that creates rights and obligations.

Filiation is the relationship which exists between a child and the child’s parents, whether the parents are of the same or the opposite sex. The relationship can be established by blood, by law in certain cases, or by a judgment of [adoption](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adoption). Once filiation has been established, it creates rights and obligations for both the child and the parents, regardless of the circumstances of the child’s birth.

**complementary filiation**

Complementary filiation was a term introduced by the group of anthropologists of Africa

who are often referred to as ‘descent theorists’, foremost of whom was M.Fortes. The phrase referred to the fact that in societies with unilineal descent groups people nonetheless recognize kinship links with relatives who do not belong to their own descent group. Thus, in societies with patrilineal descent groups, individuals have important socially-defined links with members of their mother’s family, such as, for example, their mother’s brother or their maternal grandparents, while in matrilineal societies individuals have similar ties to their father’s family.

Originally the concept was used to describe an important ethnographic characteristic of many African societies, such as the Tallensi of Ghana studied by Fortes, and the anthropologists’ theory was little more than a paraphrase of the theory of the people they had studied. Thus, Fortes described how Tallensi individuals saw their complementary filiation links as different from their lineage links, yet essential to their well-being. While lineage links always have a political and hierarchical character, complementary filiation is more emotional and more personal. This is because all members of a descent group have different ties of complementary filiation from one another, but are undifferentiated on the basis of descent, so that complementary filiation gives an idiom to feelings of individuality and independence. This sociological perspective is, argued Fortes (1961), also reflected in the religious domain. J.Goody

(1962), following in the same tradition, stressed the importance of inheritance and showed how, while one inherited a certain type of property and status inside the descent group, one also inherited different types of property and status along the lines of complementary filiation.

It is this wider theoretical implication of the theory which came under attack from such writers as Edmund Leach (1961), who argued that in those patrilineal societies which Lévi-Strauss would qualify as having an elementary structure, links through the mother was to be seen, not as manifesting a kind of muted kinship but rather as being part of affinal links. Thus, in such societies one’s mother was not seen as a ‘mother’ in the European sense, nor her brother as a man linked to her, but both would be seen as members of the group who give sexual partners to your own group. Such a distinction might seem of little importance but in fact hides a fundamental theoretical claim, namely that there is nothing universal or ‘biological’ to human kinship which constrains its

representation.

An **incest taboo**is any [cultural rule](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Convention_(norm)) or [norm](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norm_(social)) that prohibits [sexual relations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_sexual_activity) between certain members of the same [family](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Family), mainly between individuals [related by blood](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consanguinity). [All human cultures](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_universal) have norms that exclude certain close relatives from those considered suitable or permissible [sexual](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sexual_partner) or [marriage](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marriage) partners, making such relationships [taboo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taboo). However, different norms exist among cultures as to which blood relations are permissible as sexual partners and which are not. Sexual relations between related persons which are subject to the taboo are called [incestuous relationships](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Incest).

Some cultures proscribe sexual relations between [clan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clan)-members, even when no traceable biological relationship exists, while members of other clans are permissible irrespective of the existence of a biological relationship. In many cultures, certain types of cousin relations are preferred as sexual and marital partners, whereas in others these are taboo. Some cultures permit sexual and marital relations between aunts/uncles and nephews/nieces. In some instances, brother–sister marriages have been practised by the elites with some regularity. Parent–child and sibling–sibling unions are almost universally taboo. The anthropologist [Claude Lévi-Strauss](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claude_L%C3%A9vi-Strauss) developed a general argument for the universality of the incest taboo in human societies. His argument begins with the claim that the incest taboo is in effect a prohibition against [endogamy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Endogamy), and the effect is to encourage [exogamy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exogamy). Through exogamy, otherwise unrelated households or lineages will form relationships through marriage, thus strengthening social solidarity. That is, Lévi-Strauss views marriage as an exchange of women between two social groups. This theory is based in part on [Marcel Mauss](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marcel_Mauss)'s theory of [*The Gift*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Gift_(Mauss_book)).

It is also based on Lévi-Strauss's analysis of data on different kinship systems and marriage practices documented by anthropologists and historians. Lévi-Strauss called attention specifically to data collected by [Margaret Mead](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret_Mead) during her research among the [Arapesh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arapesh). When she asked if a man ever sleeps with his sister, Arapesh replied: "No we don't sleep with our sisters. We give our sisters to other men, and other men give us their sisters."

By applying Mauss's theory to data such as Mead's, Lévi-Strauss proposed what he called [alliance theory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alliance_theory). He argued that, in "primitive" societies, marriage is not fundamentally a relationship between a man and a woman, but a transaction involving a woman that forges a relationship—an alliance—between two men. His *Elementary Structures of Kinship* takes this as a starting point and uses it to analyze kinship systems of increasing complexity found in so-called primitive societies.

This theory was debated intensely by anthropologists in the 1950s. It appealed to many because it used the study of incest taboos and marriage to answer more fundamental research interests of anthropologists at the time: how can an anthropologist map out the social relationships within a given community, and how do these relationships promote or endanger social solidarity?

Some anthropologists argue that nuclear family incest avoidance can be explained in terms of the ecological, demographic, and economic benefits of exogamy.

While Lévi-Strauss generally discounted the relevance of alliance theory in Africa, a particularly strong concern for incest is a fundamental issue among the age systems of East Africa. Here, the avoidance between men of an age-set and their daughters is altogether more intense than in any other sexual avoidance. Paraphrasing Lévi-Strauss's argument, without this avoidance, the rivalries for power between age-sets, coupled with the close bonds of sharing between age-mates, could lead to a sharing of daughters as spouses. Young men entering the age system would then find a dire shortage of marriageable girls, and extended families would be in danger of dying out. Thus, by parading this avoidance of their daughters, senior men make these girls available for younger age-sets and their marriages form alliances that mitigate the rivalries for power.

Study material provided by Upasana Karmakar Modak