

Title: The demography of matriliney

Abstract: Kinship forms a significant basis of human social organization and, as such, has important consequences for demographic patterns. Matriliney is a rare but recurrent kinship system in which ties through women determine lineage membership. A number of social, ecological, and demographic variables have been tied to matrilineal kinship systems, yet a coherent synthesis of how matriliney impacts demography is lacking. In this talk, I use the Mosuo of Southwest China as a case study to begin building a coherent demography of matriliney. The Mosuo are the world's only society with distinct patrilineal and matrilineal sub-populations. The comparison of these two subpopulations reveals distinct demographic signatures, including larger households, gender-neutral parity progression, and later ages of last birth within the matrilineal subpopulation. Matriliney also seems to buffer against rising inequality, in line with a greater egalitarian ethos common to this subpopulation. I conclude by re-emphasizing the importance of kinship to human demographic systems, positing a special role for female centrality in buffering against negative health and demographic outcomes.

Bio: Siobhán M. Mattison is an assistant professor of evolutionary anthropology at the University of New Mexico. Her research uses human behavioral ecology and demographic and quantitative methods in the study of kinship, social structure, parental investment, and health outcomes. Her fieldwork is conducted with the Mosuo (Na) of Southwest China and among the Melanesian Ni-Vanuatu. She received her doctoral degree in biocultural anthropology from the University of Washington and trained as a postdoctoral fellow in anthropology and demography at Stanford University.