Matrilineal—

The term matrilineal means that descent is traced through the mother’s family line rather than the father’s. In a matrilineal society children are born into the mother’s family group, are raised by the mother’s family, and inherit social position, status, and property from the mother. A matrilineal society can be contrasted with a patrilineal society in which descent is traced through the father, and social position, status, and property is inherited from the father. (Heider, 2007)

The concept of matrilineal descent is important to anthropological research because lineage is one of the many universal concepts that help scientist understand how a society is structured and how the individuals in the society relate to one another. A group’s lineage ties into many aspects of their life and an anthropologist must study all aspects for a holistic picture of the group.

I live in the United States and my family practices non-unilineal descent rather than matrilineal descent or patrilineal descent. This means that we trace descent from both my mother and my father’s side of the family. I received my surname from my father, but my parents looked at family names from both sides of our family to decide what my middle name would be. So my name can be traced to both sides of my family. I was raised by my parents, but growing up I spent time with my grandparents from both sides of my family. I happened to spend more time with my mother’s side of the family, but only because they lived closer to us than did my father’s side of the family. When I married, my husband and I decided to follow the family tradition of giving our children names from both of our families. We depend on both sides of our family for advice and support, and we make sure that our children know and love all of their family members.

References: