



Cultural Anthropology

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Marriage and the family

One of the few cultural universals is that of groups based on the principles of kinship: mother and child, husband and wife. This does not mean that all societies have the same kind of families or even see kinship ties in the same ways; in fact, humans have developed a surprising variety of simple kinship groups. But in some form or other, kinship groups are found in all societies.

Beginning with the building blocks of families, an extremely varied set of kin groups can be constructed, because kinship

ties can be traced out indefinitely from each individual. The only limits to such extensions are human interest and memory. Add to this the possibilities of extending kinship by social fiction, such as adoption, and kinship indeed becomes a versatile principle on which to organize social groups and activities.

Bonds of kinship

There must be arrangements for encouraging human reproduction and for the nurturing and training of offspring during their prolonged dependency on adults if a society is to be viable. These needs are met in all societies by means of kinship systems.

As we have seen earlier, all role relationships can be broken down into simple pairs. Kinship groups are built on two basic types of paired or dyadic relationships: "marriage" between husband and wife and "biological descent" of child from parent. To these must be added "adoption," which is the social extension of the principle of descent beyond the biological sphere. Anthropologists have devised a set of symbols for these relationships to assist them in their analyses of even the most complex kinship systems (see Figure 10.1).

Marriage establishes a socially recognized set of relationships among a mated pair, their offspring, and society. At the core is the dyadic relationship between husband and wife, which serves three im-

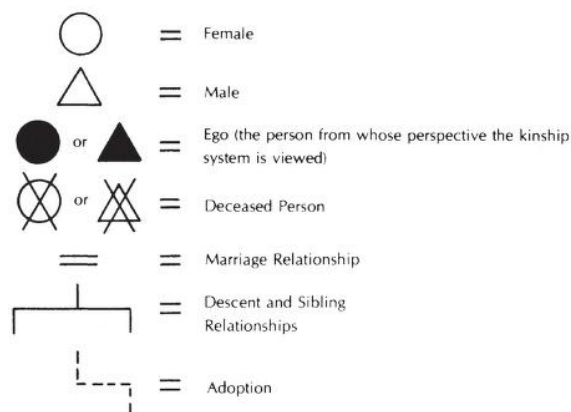


Figure 10.1 Shorthand symbols for kinship analysis help in diagramming relationships.

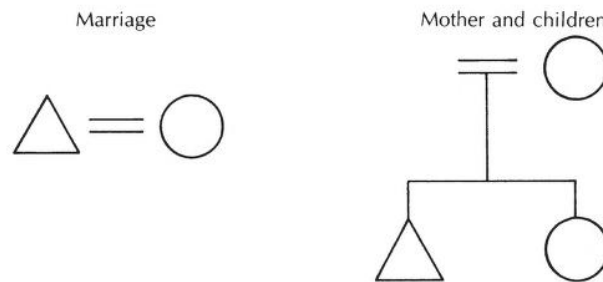


Figure 10.2 "Marriage" and "mother and children" are the principal dyadic relationships, from which all kinship groups are constructed.

portant functions: 1) it sanctions and regulates sexual mating; 2) it makes possible the reproduction of offspring; and 3) it provides for a complementary division of roles, labor, and goods between the couple.

The second important dyad in kinship groups is that between mother and child, by means of which the child is "enculturated," or taught the ways of its culture. While most societies place some responsibility on the father for rearing the child, this is not universal. But the biological and social dependency of an infant on its mother is recognized in all social societies. (See Figure 10.2.)

The "family" is a combination, in one form or another, of these two kinds of relationships within the same social group. In most societies, families meet the important needs of reproduction and enculturation, although there are some notable exceptions, where these functions are separate.

Among the Nayar, a high-ranked agricultural and military caste of south India, the household responsible for raising the children consisted of a woman, her brothers, and her children. Women often married according to Hindu customs, but this was followed in a few days by a divorce, without physical consummation of the union. Thereafter, she was free to choose her mates, and, in fact, she often set up a permanent relationship with one or more high-caste men, who fathered her children. These men, however, never joined the household nor supported their offspring. The males of the household (the brothers and sons) provided for the household and helped to rear the children. In this society, the sexual bond was separate from child rearing, and instead of the conjugal family as we know it, a household composed of a group of related women and their brothers and sons provided for enculturation and continuation of the society.

The marriage dyad

Marriage institutionalizes the relationships between a couple and serves as the basis for the establishment of a family. Different societies, however, give different answers to the questions of who, when, how, and how many one may marry.

Restrictions on marriage

All societies practice some form of "exogamy," the rule that a person must marry outside of the culturally defined kinship group of which he is a member. Mating between parent and child and between brother and sister are considered incestuous in almost all societies. The most striking exceptions are the brother-sister marriages which were required of the royal families of Egypt, Hawaii, Persia, Siam, and the Incas of Peru, to preserve the sacred nature of the royal lineages. A few societies require the marriage of boy and girl twins, on the basis that they have been together in the mother's womb.

Beyond the circle of immediate family members, the line of exogamy varies greatly from society to society, depending in part on how relatives are determined and defined. The Chinese prohibit marriage between people sharing the same surname, while high-caste Indians often prohibit marriages between seventh or ninth cousins. Even in the United States, there are differences from state to state in laws regarding marriage between first and second cousins.

Several explanations have been advanced for the universal presence of incest and exogamy. Early anthropologists, such as Morgan (1877) and Westermarck (1925), argued that inbreeding led to biological degeneration and that societies prevented this by imposing rules of exogamy. The fact is, inbreeding only intensifies the traits already present in the population. "Good" genetic traits, such as those related to high intelligence and resistance to certain diseases, found in a group of people are reinforced and spread by inbreeding. The same, of course, is true of undesirable traits, like low intelligence and susceptibility to specific diseases. However, in balance, given the slow rate of human reproduction and the small populations of human tribes throughout much of history, it appears that the effects of exogamy have been genetically beneficial. The intermingling of genes in new combinations gives rise to an increased variety of biological forms, and new possibilities emerge.

Malinowski (1931) argued that the family would disintegrate as a viable social unit if there were no sanctions against sexual unions of members within the family. These sanctions serve to reduce conflicts in both emotions and roles between family members.

Tylor (1888) and Fortune (1932) advanced other structural arguments to account for exogamy; exogamy, they said, reduces the development of hostile factions within a society. One of the primary threats to any society is the potential for conflict between groups. Marriage alliances between groups help prevent these hostilities from erupting into feuds and wars. In this sense, the exchange of brides, like the trading of economic goods and giving of gifts, helps to integrate the society. Some have questioned the validity of this argument, for while marriage may be useful in forming social alliances, as we see in the history of European royalty, there is no proof that such alliances are crucial to the survival of the society.

A second principle regulating marriages in many societies is that of “endogamy,” the rule that people must marry others of their own kind. While exogamy excludes marriage to kinsmen, endogamy excludes those who are culturally defined as “outsiders.” (See Figure 10.3.) Tribes and village communities are frequently endogamous groups. So, too, are some tightly knit ethnic groups in the United States, like the Pennsylvania Dutch and the Hutterites.

Classic examples of endogamy are caste systems, such as that in India. Marriages in rural Indian society, with rare exception, take place only within one of thousands of subcastes, many of which number no more than 3,000 people. The selection of a spouse is often limited, and

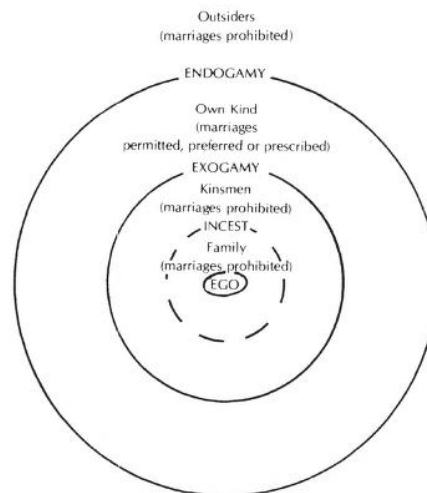


Figure 10.3 In some relationships marriage is permitted; in others, it is prohibited.

parents frequently make marriage arrangements for their children when they are still young. Similar patterns of endogamy may be found in the United States within particular racial groups.

Prescribed and preferential marriages

Societies not only forbid certain types of marriages, they may also encourage or require others. A common social preference is marriage to one's cross-cousin. Kinship systems, such as our own, do not distinguish between descent through the male line and descent through the female line and, therefore, make no distinction between different types of cousins. Many societies, however, trace kinship ties through either the male or the female line. In such societies, a person belongs to the kinship group of his father or to that of his mother but not to both. Thus, distinctions between types of cousins assume importance.

In such societies, "parallel cousins," who are the children of two brothers or two sisters, may belong to the same kin group; but cross-cousins, who are children of a brother and a sister, are not related to each other and therefore can be married. (See Figure 10.4.) In some societies, as in south India, people prefer cross-cousin marriages so that parents do not have to marry their children to strangers, about whom they know little and over whom they can exercise little influence.

Some societies practice asymmetrical cross-cousin marriages, which

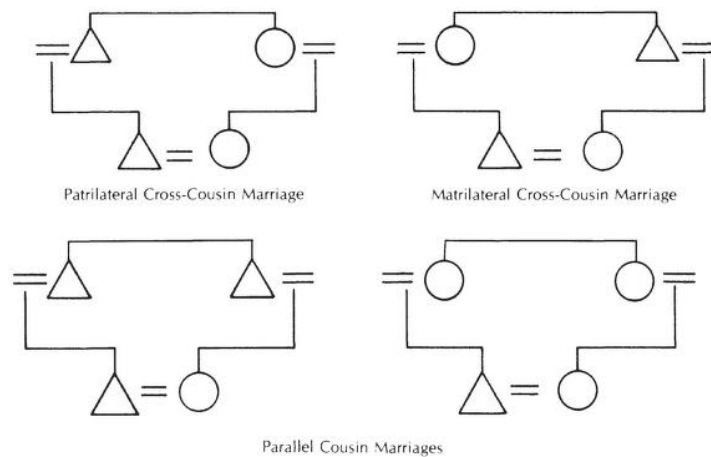


Figure 10.4 Cross- and parallel cousin marriages are of three types: patrilateral, matrilateral, and parallel.

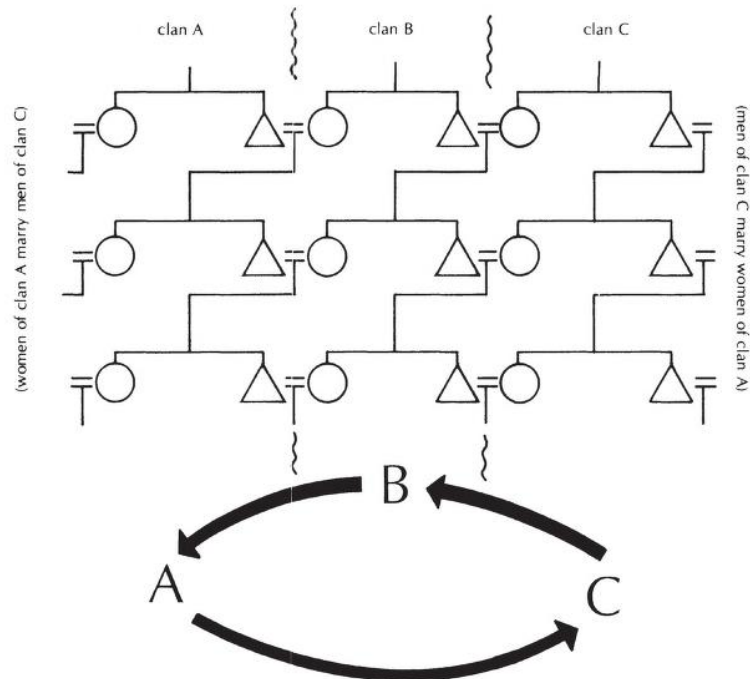


Figure 10.5 Matrilineal cross-cousin marriages ideally lead to a circulation of women among kinship groups and to greater interdependence among the kinship groups.

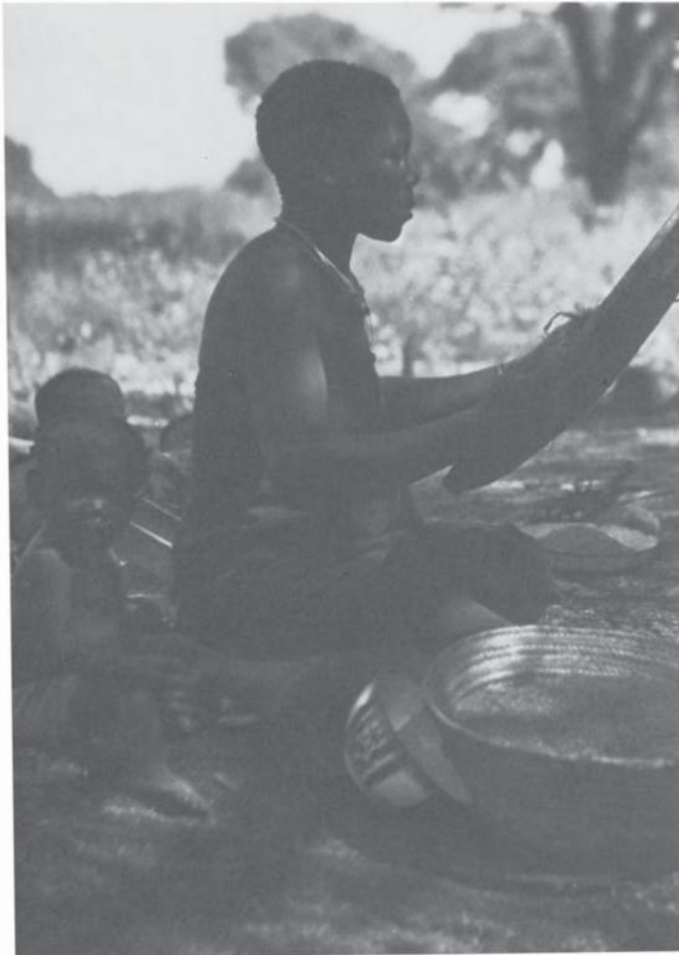
permit men to marry their fathers' sisters' daughters but not their mothers' brothers' daughters or vice versa. As Levi-Strauss (1969) has pointed out, this leads to a pattern of marriage exchange, in which one kinship group takes brides from a second group and gives brides to a third. In other words, a man takes a bride from the group from which his mother came. (See Figure 10.5.)

Cross-cousin marriage may not only be preferred; it may be required, if a suitable bride is available. Among the high-ranked Komati caste in south India, for example, a man can demand the hand of his mother's brother's daughter (matrilateral cross-cousin) in marriage, and many a father has had to bribe an undesirable nephew to keep him from pressing this claim. Marriage to a father's sister's daughter (patrilateral cross-cousin) is permitted, but there is no right of demand, and

the marriage is considered demeaning to the man. He is expected to show respect to his father's sister and her children; thus, to marry her daughter would undermine his authority as a husband.

The marriage of parallel cousins is a notable exception to the rule of kinship exogamy. This custom was practiced by the Semites in early biblical times. For example, Isaac married his father's brother's granddaughter, and Jacob also took a wife related to him through the male line. The practice of parallel cousin marriage was spread by Arabic Muslims throughout the Near East, north Africa, and south Asia.

Robert Spencer (1952) argues that parallel cousin marriages serve an important function in seminomadic pastoral societies, that of consolidating the band and its resources into a strong fighting force, which can withstand the attacks of other bands. Band exogamy, in such cases,



Young children in Uhehe, Tanzania stay close to mother as she winnows grain. Photo courtesy of E.V. Winans.

would undermine group solidarity in a highly mobile and competitive society.

Marriage payments and gifts

Marriages are frequently associated with some type of economic exchange. Most common is that of the "bride price," in which the groom and his family make a payment to the bride's family at the time of marriage. This does not necessarily mean that women are bought and sold as property or that they rank low in status and power within the society. Rather, the payment serves several important functions, which strengthen the marriage and family.

Among the Baganda of east Africa, for example, a man may inherit a wife by means of the levirate,* be given a wife as a gift, or capture one in a raid, but it is preferable that his first wife be obtained by negotiations and the payment of a bride price. The final price agreed on reflects the social prestige of the families of both the bride and the groom.

The groom is particularly careful in selecting a suitable bride, because accumulating the amount needed is often a long and difficult task. Later, he will think twice before divorcing her, because his kinsmen, who contributed towards his first marriage, may be unwilling to finance a second.

Bride price is, in part, a compensation to the bride's family for their investment in her and their loss of her future labor. It also serves, in a sense, as a prepaid alimony, since it is generally not returned if the husband later initiates a divorce. In many cases, the payment represents claim of the husband to his wife's children and the compensation he pays to her family for the loss of their daughter's offspring. For this reason it has sometimes been called a "progeny price." In some societies, children born before the full price is paid belong to the bride's family. Furthermore, the relatives of a barren wife must often provide another bride or return the payment. The Vezo Sakalva of Madagascar go so far as to require that women who divorce and remarry must give one or more of their children by their second husbands to the first husbands, who paid their bride prices. Refunds or substitutions are forbidden.

"Suitor service" fulfills many of the same functions as the bride price. The groom meets his obligations to his in-laws by serving them in specific ways. Sometimes this service may be in lieu of a bride price, but often it is required. Moreover, a man may have life-long obligations to his parents-in-law.

* See the discussion "Marriage Substitutions," following.

Sun Chief: The Autobiography of a Hopi Indian

Leo W. Simmons

One evening . . . my old pal Louis came from Moenkopi. . . . He was as eager to go out among the girls as ever and asked me to suggest one. I told him that I was not familiar with any girls in Oraibi and did not like it so well for that reason. Louis said, "I have made love with lola of the Fire Clan before, but now she does not like me very well." I knew that she was staying with her clan sister, Irene, whose parents had gone to the field house at Loloma Spring. Since we could think of no other available lovers, Louis said, "Let's take these girls by force." I discouraged it and told him that I had never used force on any girl. . . . But Louis urged until I finally agreed.

We found the girls grinding corn and decided to sneak into Irene's house and wait in the dark. Finally, as the two entered, Louis grabbed lola and blew out the light. I caught hold of Irene and quickly assured her that she had nothing to fear. . . . I put my arms around Irene, drew her to me, and said, "What is in your mind?" "Have you asked your parents about this?" she inquired. "No, but I will shortly," I answered. . . . I begged Irene urgently with words of love and promises of marriage. Finally she said, "It's up to you." . . .

The next day . . . I asked for the hand of Irene. He replied: "My daughter is not a good-looking girl. If your relatives are willing, you may have her." I told him that I had my parents' consent and that they were well pleased. This was a lie, but a necessary one in order to spend the night with Irene. They agreed and arranged for us to have the next room. . . .

At [home the next morning] I raised the subject of marriage. "I spent the night at Huminquima's," I said. "And now I want to marry his daughter, Irene." "What did they say?" asked my mother. I assured her that Irene's parents had already agreed. . . . My father spoke: "Well, I won't object, for then you would think I am against you. You are not a good-looking man, and she is not a beautiful woman, so I think you will stay together and treat each other fairly. A good-looking woman neglects her husband, because it is so easy to get another." . . .

The wedding costumes were completed in January. For each bride* there were two blankets whitened with kaolin, a finely woven belt, and an expensive pair of white buckskin moccasins. Soft prayer feathers were attached to

* [Sun chief and Louis arranged a joint wedding.]

Source: Leo W. Simmons, *Sun Chief: The Autobiography of a Hopi Indian*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942), pp. 212–214, 216–217, 220–223, with omissions.

the corners of the blankets. Each bride was to wear the large blanket and carry the small one rolled in a reed case when she returned to her house. The small blanket was to be carefully preserved and draped about her at death—as wings to speed her to dear ones in the House of the Dead. The beautiful belt was to serve as tail to a bird, guiding the bride in her spiritual flight.

There was a feast for our close relatives on the day that the men completed the wedding outfits. The brides made puddings, and we butchered and cooked the two sheep that Kalnimptewa had given to us. We gathered at sunset, and the brides took special pains to be good hostesses and to see that everyone was happy and well fed. After the meal they cleared the food away, and our great-uncles, Talasquaptewa and Kayayeptewa, made speeches to them: “We Sun Clan people are very thankful that you brides have come to our household and have taken such good care of us. You have proven yourselves to be good housewives by feeding us all. The wedding outfits are completed, and tomorrow you will return to your homes. We are now the same people, sisters, brothers, uncles, and aunts to each other. Look on the bright side of each day, treat your husbands right, and enjoy your lives. . . .”

[At a later feast, Talasquaptewa addressed his nephews.] “Thank you, my nephews. You are not very good-looking, and I thought you were never going to marry. I am glad that you have chosen such fine wives. You know every woman hates a lazy man, so you must work hard and assist your new fathers in the field and with the herding. When they find that you are good helpers, they will be pleased and treat you like real sons. When you kill game, or find spinach or other food plants in the field, bring them to your wives. They will receive them gladly. Make believe that your wife is your real mother. Take good care of her, treat her fairly, and never scold her. If you love your wife, she will love you, give you joy, and feed you well. Even when you are worried and unhappy, it will pay you to show a shining face to her. If your married life is a failure, it will be your own fault. Please prove yourselves to be men worthy of your clan. . . .”

It is customary for the groom to decide when he will move into his wife’s house. . . . As I returned from hobbling the horses, Irene came to our house calling, “Come and eat.” She invited all my family—according to custom—but they properly declined. I meekly followed my wife to her home and sat down with the family to a dish of hot tamales wrapped in cornhusks and ties with yucca stems. But I ate so slowly that Irene’s mother unwrapped the tamales and placed them in a row before me. I thought, “This old lady is very kindhearted, perhaps she will do this for me always.” But I was mistaken; at breakfast I had to unwrap my own tamales, and was put to work for my wife’s people.



Mother and child
at market, Ambato,
Ecuador.
Photo courtesy of
Vaughn Chapman.

"Dowry," or payments by the bride's family to the groom, are less common. Among the higher classes in Europe and higher castes in south Asia, where the custom was once widespread, the dowry was a means of assisting the couple in the expensive task of establishing a household. Much the same function is served in our own society by the practice of giving gifts to the couple at the time of marriage.

Marriage dissolution

No society approves of divorce, but very few (less than four percent) forbid it completely. Most societies make constant efforts to strengthen the marriage relationship by means of rewards and threats. Nevertheless, there are people in every society caught in intolerable binds of social relationships and cultural expectations, for whom the only solution appears to be dissolution of the marriage.

Murdock (1949) studied forty non-European societies and found that more than seventy-five percent permitted divorce on the basis of repeated infidelity, sexual impotence or unwillingness, and laziness or nonsupport. More than half permitted divorce for reasons of incompatibility, infidelity, childlessness, and nagging. Less than a third permitted divorce on any grounds, however trivial.

Twenty-four of the same forty societies had an incidence of divorce which was greater than our own, but sixteen gave evidence of more

stable marriages than in our society. In three quarters of these societies, it is as easy for a woman to obtain a divorce as for a man. Six make it easier for the man, but four make it easier for the woman.

Divorce in societies with strong extended kinship groups appears to be less disruptive than in American society, where the nuclear family remains the basis for most social activities and responsibilities. Women in these societies return, with their children, to live with their relatives or remarry without delay, because often there are no acceptable roles for unmarried adult women.

Wife stealing is another cause for marriage dissolution which is found in a number of societies. Eskimo men used to steal a neighbor's wife, but the neighbor in turn was expected to kill the thief and get back his wife. The wife-stealer, therefore, often found it prudent to kill the husband before taking his wife. Murders associated in one way or another with wife stealing were once common in Eskimo society and a source of considerable social tension.

The conjugal-natal family

In many societies, marriages give rise to "conjugal-natal families," consisting of a husband and wife and their children. In the course of a lifetime, most people twice belong to such a family, once as a child and again as a parent. Consequently, a person faces conflicts of loyalties, to parents and siblings on the one hand and to spouse and offspring on the other. (See Figure 10.6.)

Types of conjugal-natal families

As with other cultural traits, patterns of marriage and family life vary from society to society. The Judeo-Christian practice of "monogamy," or taking only one wife in a lifetime, is found in a relatively small number of societies around the world. Even in Western countries influenced by Christian thought, strict monogamy is not always enforced. Often, men and women may have as many spouses as they choose, so long as they are married to only one at a time, a practice known as "serial monogamy." Many high Indian castes enforce strict monogamy, at least for the female, by prohibiting divorce and forbidding the remarriage of widows.

Middle-class Americans stress the importance of the husband-wife relationship within the role pairs of the family, while also stressing the individual's loyalty to his spouse and to the family in which he is a parent. Consequently, young people move from the home of their

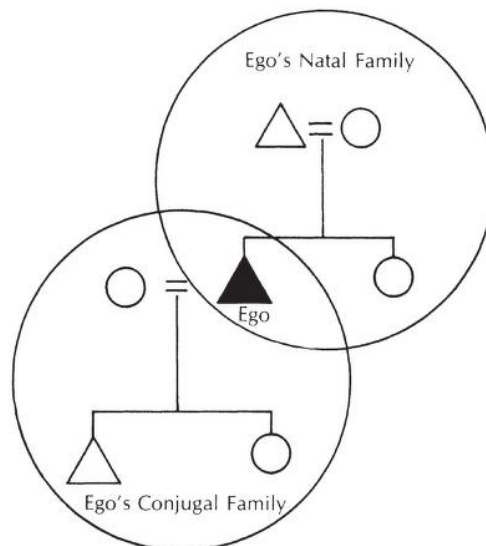


Figure 10.6 The generational nature of the conjugal-natal family shows the potential for a conflict of loyalties.

parents to live with a new spouse, whom they may have known for only a few months. If the wife should quarrel with her mother-in-law, the husband is expected to side with his wife against his mother.

Independent nuclear families, such as we have in the United States, are the smallest type of kinship group that can be formed by combining both the marriage and descent dyads. (See Figure 10.7.) The small size and relative independence of such families is an adaptation to the rapid change and status mobility that modern achievement-oriented societies such as ours demand. Nevertheless, a price must be paid for independence and social flexibility, in that conjugal families are relatively unstable groups, with little continuity over time. Children form their own families, leaving parents alone in their old age. Divorce or death may break the marriage relationship, leaving the children with no parents or with parental substitutes to care for them.

Moreover, the constant change in families, as old ones die out and new ones are formed, keeps the family from becoming the basis for organized, long-term social or economic activities, such as providing for the social security of its members, organizing an industry, or main-

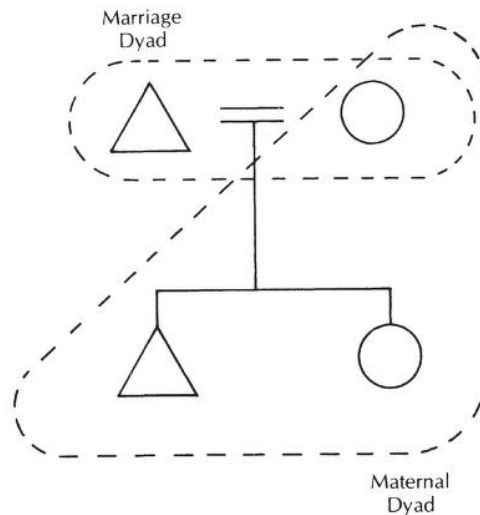


Figure 10.7 The nuclear family combines the marriage and maternal dyads into a single social unit.

taining an estate. In a few generations, the separation of heirs into different families makes joint action increasingly difficult.

As we shall see later, larger kinship groups have nuclear families as subgroups within them, but the interests of these families in many areas are subordinated to those of the larger kin body.

"Polygamous" marriage, in which a person is married to more than one spouse at a time, can be divided into "polygyny," the marriage of a man to several wives, and "polyandry," the marriage of a woman to several husbands. (See Figure 10.8.) The former is practiced in almost one half of the world's societies, but the latter is rare.

In polygynous families, several mother-child dyads are linked to the same husband. Each of the wives may be housed in a separate hut with her children, or all the wives may share the same house. Jealousy and quarreling between co-wives is common, and many societies encourage "sororal polygyny," or the marriage of a man to several sisters, in the belief that this will help to prevent discord in the household. On the other hand, it is not uncommon for a wife to ask her husband to take another wife to help with the family duties, to produce offspring, or to add to her prestige as the dominant wife in a polygynous family.

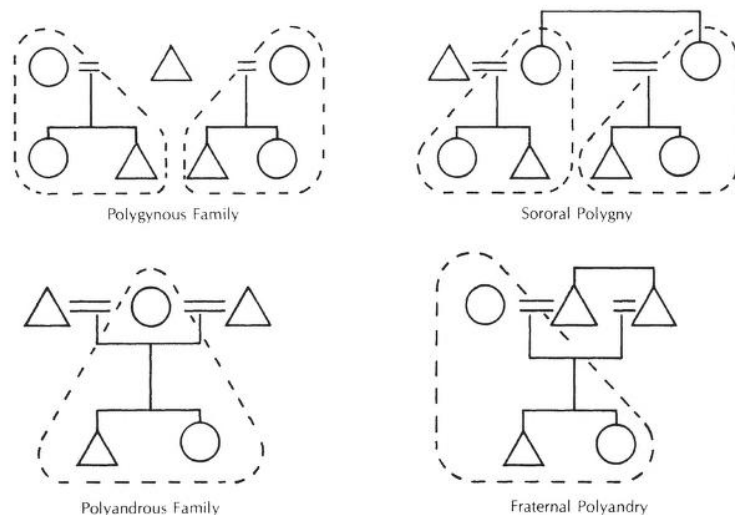
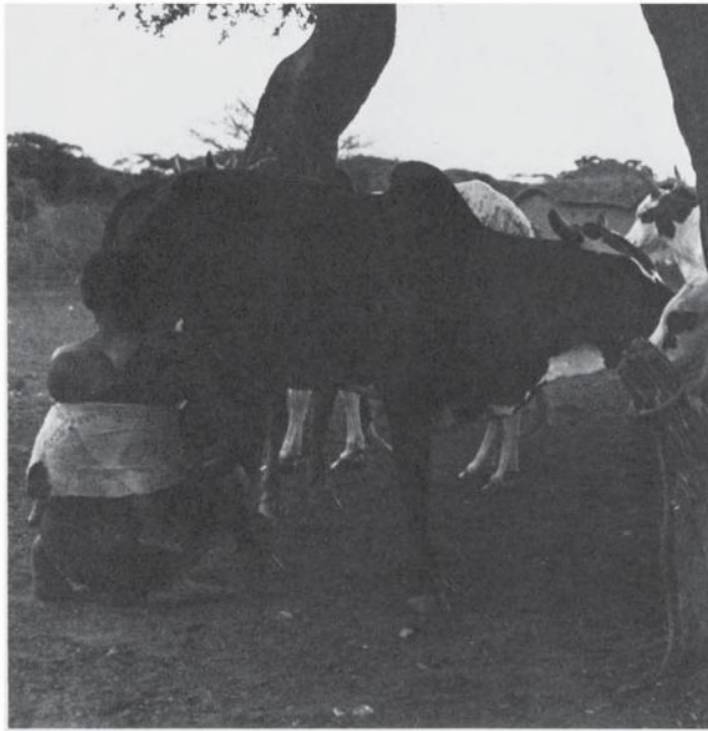


Figure 10.8 There are several types of polygamous families.

Polygyny serves different purposes in different societies. Additional wives may add labor and income to the family, as well as prestige. It is common in west Africa, among tribes which prohibit sexual intercourse between a couple after the birth of a child until the child is more than a year old. This postpartum (after birth) taboo on sexual relationships enables a child to nurse longer and therefore have a better chance of surviving kwashiorkor, a disease caused by protein deficiency. During this period, husbands with more than one wife are able to satisfy their sexual drives legitimately. As we shall see later, polygyny may also serve as the solution to major social crises.

Polyandry is found primarily in Tibet and among the Eskimos and some tribes in south India. A common form is that of fraternal polyandry, in which a woman becomes the wife of her husband's younger brothers. In some cases, a man may be unable alone to pay the price of obtaining and supporting a wife, so he seeks the assistance of his brothers. In others, as Leach points out (1961:104–113), the custom is associated with the inheritance of land through the male line.

While many societies permit polygamy of one type or another, the number of multiple marriages in any particular society usually is low. The relatively equal balance between men and women and the



Mothers in Tanzania are obliged to carry their infants as they work at essential tasks. Photo courtesy of E.V. Winans.

problems of organizing and maintaining a large family dictate monogamous marriage, except for those with wealth and power.

"Group marriages" are very rare, and apart from experimental attempts at communal life in America, have only been reported mainly in the Himalayan region, where a group of brothers sometimes marries a group of sisters. In these cases, there is a fairly clear distinction of the rights and responsibilities among the members and between them and their offspring. There is little evidence that group marriages were ever normative for early humans, as suggested by anthropologists at the turn of the century, in their attempts to formulate a theory of the evolution of the family.

Marriage substitutions

Marriage not only serves the primary purpose of establishing families; it also may be used by a society to solve some difficult problems arising from social crises. The sudden deaths of men and women in their prime years, when they bear major responsibilities for repro-

ducing and maintaining life, are common to all societies, and the problems which result from such losses must be dealt with.

In American society, we are primarily concerned with meeting the economic needs of the surviving family. Thus, parents are expected to make adequate arrangements by means of savings, insurance, and social security. However, the society does a poor job of fulfilling the other primary functions of the family. There is little provision for parent substitutes to raise the children and to produce more offspring.

Many other societies solve the crises caused by death by arranging for a substitute spouse to assume the roles and responsibilities of the deceased, in much the same way that we make provision for a new President when one dies. Among these, the most common form of substitute marriage is the "levirate," in which the dead man's brother or a close male relative assumes the roles of husband and father when death occurs. In such cases, the sexual rights of marriage are incidental to the responsibilities of supporting the family and rearing the children.

The "sororate" serves a parallel function on the death of a wife—the kin group which provided the husband with a wife is expected to provide him with an unmarried sister or female relative of the first bride as a substitute wife and mother. (See Figure 10.9.)

Among people who practice the levirate, it is common for a man's younger brothers to discipline his children and to assume other parental prerogatives, even during his life. Although death of a parent is psychologically traumatic for young children everywhere, it is apparently less so where a substitute parent is arranged, particularly if this person is one who has already served in a parental role. These same principles hold true in the sororate.

The levirate and sororate also serve social functions. By arranging a substitute marriage to a man within the male kin group by means of the levirate, the group retains its hold on the children who are essential to its perpetuation. The sororate, on the other hand, reaffirms the alliances between the kin groups.

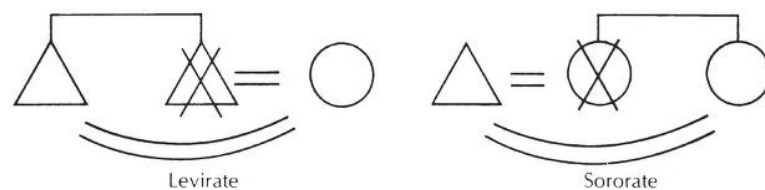


Figure 10.9 Marriage extensions are either levirate or sororate in type.

In cases where there is neither sibling nor relative of the same generation in a kin group to substitute for a deceased husband or wife, a few societies arrange for a replacement from an older or younger generation within the kin group. Where kinship is reckoned through the male line, a widower may marry his former wife's brother's daughter. If the kinship group is formed on the basis of female ties, a woman may marry her deceased husband's sister's son. Such arrangements reinforce the identity of the kin groups and the ties between them.

Marriage extensions

Not all societies restrict the rights and responsibilities of marriage to the immediate pair. Many allow the partners to extend these privileges to others by socially recognized means. For example, some societies which practice the levirate allow a man to share his sexual rights to his wife with his younger unmarried brothers, reasoning that they will replace him as husband if he dies. This custom, sometimes referred to as "anticipatory levirate," is a form of *de facto* polyandry, but in many cases, the privileges are withdrawn when the younger brothers marry.

The parallel practice of "anticipatory sororate" permits a man to have sexual intercourse with the unmarried sister of his wife, on the assumption that she is potentially his wife, on the death of his present wife.

Marriage extensions are carried one step further in some societies by allowing men to extend marriage rights to other men, whom they consider to be sociological or blood brothers, or even to close friends and partners, whether or not they are already married. This practice of wife hospitality generally serves several important functions other than sexual gratification.

An example may be seen in the Eskimos of northern Alaska, who inhabit small villages along the seacoast and trade with nomadic bands of Eskimos, who live in the interior near the mountains. A coastal male forms partnerships with men in other villages and in the interior bands, who provide him with protection and assistance whenever he is away from his home village. Partners will also offer him their wives to dry and chew his clothes, in order to keep them soft, and to seal the bond of friendship. The hospitality is reciprocated when the partners visit his village. A man also needs a partner or partners in his own village to care for his wife and children during his absence.

In tribal societies, there is danger and possible death in traveling beyond one's own territory and tribe. Thus, male partnerships, affirmed by wife hospitality, become a means of guaranteeing a measure of security and making trade and travel possible.

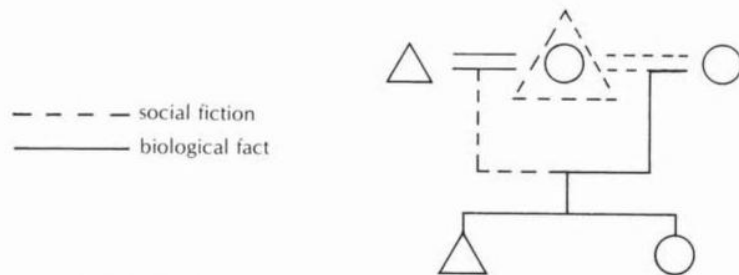


Figure 10.10 The Nuer “woman marriage” is a combination of social fiction and biological fact.

Fictive marriages

A few societies have developed special forms of marriage to meet specific needs. One of these is “adoptive marriages,” which are found in Indonesia, Japan, and south India. In some Indian castes, a prosperous family having only daughters is faced with the problem of maintaining the family name and inheritance. The legal fiction of an adoptive marriage (*illitum*), in which the husband of one of their daughters becomes a “son” in his wife’s family and carries on the family name, solves a critical problem. In giving up his own name, a man loses some prestige, but the economic gains may outweigh the social losses.

Among some west African tribes, a barren woman may arrange for a second wife for her husband, in order to provide him with children. The children of the second wife call the first wife “father,” because she filled the male role of negotiating the marriage.

The Nuer of east Africa practice a “woman marriage” for wives who are barren. The childless woman marries another woman, with whom her husband has sexual relationships. The children, however, are considered to be the offspring of the first rather than the second wife. (See Figure 10.10.) In some cases, a woman may be married to the “ghost” of a man, and children she has by another man are attributed to the deceased and perpetuate his name.

Fictive marriages such as these serve important social functions, even though the biological processes may not fit the normal patterns of the society.

Extended families

While Americans place a high priority on the marriage relationship, which results in the constant fragmentation of kin groups into nuclear families, a majority of the world’s societies emphasize parent-child re-

relationships. In some, a man's first loyalty is to his father, and when he marries, his wife joins him in his father's household. In other societies, the mother-daughter relationship is considered dominant, and a husband joins the family of his mother-in-law. The result in both cases is the "extended family," which links two or more nuclear families into a single household. (See Figures 10.11 and 10.12.)

In many societies, the ideal is that siblings remain together following the death of the patriarch or matriarch (this is sometimes referred to as the "joint family"), but in fact, few seem to survive the passing of the older generation. The social bonds between brothers and particularly half-brothers in polygynous families appear unable to bear the economic stresses of limited resources.

The extended family provides a greater measure of security than do nuclear families. In event of sudden illness or death of a husband or wife, there are others who can take over the responsibilities. The extended family also provides parents with assistance and guidance in child rearing. Usually, there are several women who care for the children and a number of men who can perform essential family tasks. The extended family also provides a check on maltreatment of children by

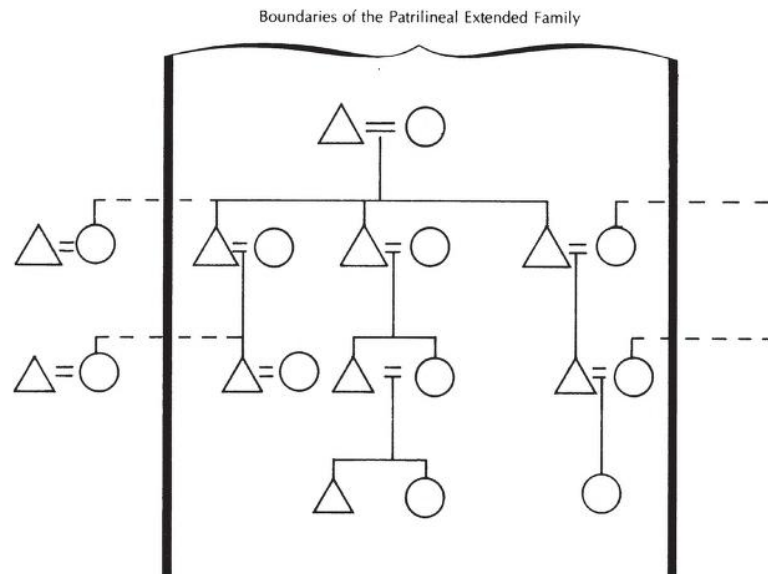


Figure 10.11 A patrilineal extended family is composed of a patriarch, his sons and grandsons, and their wives and offspring.

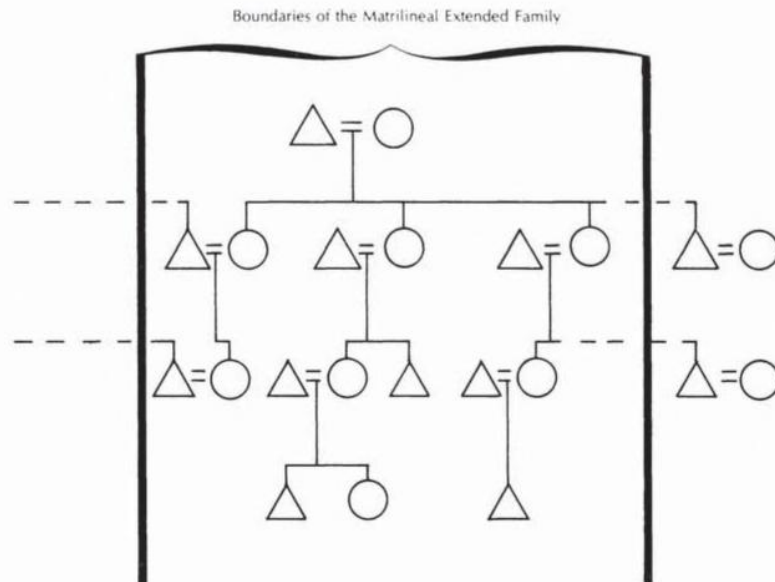


Figure 10.12 A matrilineal extended family is composed of a matriarch, her daughters and granddaughters, and their husbands and offspring.

incompetent parents, a danger not uncommon in nuclear families. Marriages are not accompanied by the setting up of new households, and a new couple may build their sleeping quarters adjacent to the central house, but frequently it joins the others in a common kitchen. The husband and wife join in the overall responsibilities and tasks of the extended family.

Another explanation for the rise of extended families appears to be economic. They are frequently found in sedentary agricultural societies, where large labor forces and consolidated land holdings are an advantage. As we shall see later, some types of kinship systems can give rise to larger kinship groups, which can act in a corporate or united fashion.

Households

People tend to cluster together into "households," or domestic groups which share a common residence. We have already seen, in the case of the Nayar, that households do not always include a marriage

dyad, but such cases are the exception rather than the rule. Technically, households, like other residential groups, are based on the principle of geographic proximity, but because of their close ties to the family, they will be discussed here.

Anthropologists use a number of terms for different patterns of residence for the newly married couple. One must keep in mind that these terms describe residential rules or the expectations of a society, and that in practice there may be many exceptions. Furthermore, the terms are imprecise. When it is said that the couple lives "near the groom's father," it is not clear whether they live in the same house with him, an adjacent house, or even in the same community. Nor is it clear to what extent they join in the affairs of the household. Nevertheless, the terms are commonly used in ethnographic descriptions.

"Neolocal residence" means that the newly married couple is expected to establish a new residence apart from either parent and other relatives. This practice, which is so familiar to middle-class American society with its stress on independence, is, in fact, found in only about five percent of the world's societies. Far more common is the idea that young couples should live near and likely join the household of one of their relatives.

In "patrilocal residence," the wife comes to live with or near her husband's parents. This pattern, found in about two thirds of the societies around the world, is commonly associated with the patrilineal extended family. "Matrilocal residence," in which the couple lives near the bride's relatives, is not so common. "Bilocal" is the term used when the couple is expected to live with the parents of either the bride or the groom.

In some societies, the couple is expected to live with the husband's mother's brother. This pattern, known as "avunculocal residence," is commonly associated with kinship groups in which a man has a close relationship with and often responsibility for his sister's son.

"Duolocal residence" refers to the relatively rare cases where the husband and wife live apart, each with his kin. In such cases, as among the Ashanti of west Africa, marriages do not mean common residence, and husbands periodically visit their wives in their wives' homes.

The reasons why one residence pattern arises in particular situations rather than another is not always clear. As Ember (1973) points out, there is some evidence that neolocal residence is associated with commercial economies in which money is a medium of exchange. Unlike food and other material goods, money can be preserved indefinitely, and stored by the nuclear family to guard against future crises. Societies based on the trade of goods and services apparently depend on extended residential groups for security.

Summary

All kinship systems are built on two types of relationships: marriage and descent. With these two, an astonishing variety of groups can be constructed, from various types of families to complex networks involving hundreds, even thousands of people.

Every society has cultural rules prohibiting marriage to certain people, generally close kinsmen and those who are considered outsiders, as well as rules giving preference to other people. Each also has norms regulating divorce.

Marriages serve a great many different functions. In most societies, these include the granting of sexual rights, a division of labor, and the responsibilities of caring for the offspring, but this need not always be the case. An exception is the Nayers, among whom the residential economic family consisted of a woman, her brother, and her children, and where sexual rights were dealt with outside of the family context. In many societies, substitute marriages are also used to solve social crises created by the death of a spouse by prescribing a substitute. And in a few societies, marriages are used to reinforce bonds of friendship to insure safety in potentially hostile territories.

The marriage dyad is combined with the descent dyad of mother and child to form the nuclear family, which is found in almost every culture. In addition, many societies extend the kinship network to form larger groups, such as the extended family. While these larger groups may take precedence over loyalties to the nuclear families that exist within them, the fact is that all societies have some type of family group which constitutes the primary form of social organization on which all other forms are raised.

Suggested readings

- Bohannon, Paul, and John Middleton, eds.
1968 *Marriage, Family and Residence*. Garden City, N.Y.: The Natural History Press. (A very useful collection of readings, covering both theoretical and ethnographic articles.)
- Goody, J.R., ed.
1958 *The Developmental Cycle in Domestic Groups*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (A dynamic view of family organization.)
- Homans, G.C., and D.M. Schneider
1955 *Marriage, Authority, and Final Causes: A Study of Unilateral Cross-Cousin Marriage*. New York: Free Press. (A critical analysis of the concept that marriage is a form of exchange.)

- Radcliffe-Brown, A.R., and D. Forde, eds.
1950 African Systems of Kinship and Marriage. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Brief studies of marriage in nine African tribes.)
- Schneider, D.M.
1968 American Kinship: A Cultural Account. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall. (An interesting application of anthropological methods to American life.)
- Winch, R.F., and L.W. Goodman, eds.
1968 Selected Studies in Marriage and the Family. 3rd ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. (Readings in contemporary sociology of the family; an excellent collection of articles on Western families.)