

Family, kinship, and descent

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- So, we have seen that gender identity is socially constructed
 - that takes us naturally to marriage and sex
 - which will then take us to descent
 - **descent**: rules by which we identify and categorize our ancestors and offspring
 - which will then take us to kinship
 - **kinship**: rules by which we categorize and interact with all our relatives (our **kin**)
 - which in turn plays a big role in creating personal identities and structuring marriages...
 - remember “culture is integrated” and “culture can be understood as a system”
 - each of these parts (identity, gender, marriage, descent, kinship) is profoundly shaped by the others, and affects the others in turn
 - you can’t really understand any one in isolation
 - each only makes full sense in the context of all the rest
- Marriage, family, and kinship are... socially constructed
 - variable from one culture to the next
 - we think of marriage as being
 - a personal choice made by two people
 - having largely to do with romantic love and sex
 - this reflects our egocentric concept of personhood in general
 - many, if not most, societies see marriage very differently
 - as a choice made between groups (the kin groups of each spouse)
 - for social, economic, and political reasons
 - this reflects more sociocentric concepts of personhood
 - in which your identity and behavior depend crucially on your position in social networks, especially of your kin
 - the view of marriage as a contract between two kin groups is shown by widespread practices of
 - negotiating approval from the family of each spouse
 - marriages being arranged by kin with only minor input from the spouses, sometimes even before they are born
 - negotiating exchanges of goods and/or labor between the groups
 - *relatives* of the spouses negotiate, not the couple!
 - rights and obligations of the kin groups
 - obligations to raise the children
 - rights to labor of one or both spouses and/or the children, etc.
 - replacement of a spouse if he or she dies too soon
 - if a wife dies, her relatives may be obliged to provide a replacement wife, typically the dead wife’s sister
 - this practice is called the **sororate**

- if a husband dies, his relatives may be obliged to provide a replacement husband, typically the dead husband's brother
 - this is the practice of **levirate**
- this fits with sociocentric concepts of personhood that stress the embeddedness of identity in social relations
 - if a man dies right after his wedding binds two families together, it makes sense for his brother to step in and replace him...
 - remember the Duo Donggo la Ninde who was reminded of how he did not own himself; he was owned by his parents, kin, village, and God...
- **kinship system**: a society's system of classifying and relating to relatives
 - depends in part on the **descent** system
 - socially constructed
 - based in part on biology, but largely arbitrary
 - as in the Nuyoo of Oaxaca, who consider some people to have multiple mothers
 - the one who gave birth to them, and the one(s) who nursed (breast-fed) them
 - if even who counts as your mother is culturally constructed, clearly kinship is not made up only of biological facts
 - US kinship system is very reduced compared to most societies
- kinship: who you are related to
 - how you classify and name your relatives
 - which relatives you classify as being the “same” or “different”
 - we call a parent's bother our uncle
 - but are all uncles equivalent (related to you in the same way), or is your mother's brother (your maternal uncle) different from your father's brother (paternal uncle)?
 - what about spouses of uncles and aunts... they are also uncles and aunts, right?
 - yet the descent relationship between you and your uncle is clearly different from that between you and his wife, who is not biologically related to you at all
 - point: how we lump people as being the “same” relatives or different ones is arbitrary and culturally constructed
- how you interact with different relatives
 - do you interact to your father the same way as to his brother (your uncle)?
- **nuclear family**: parents and children (including adoptees: **fictive kinship**)
 - US typically sees nuclear families as relatively autonomous, basic unit
 - but other societies, the nuclear family really does not exist as a separate entity; always part of a larger network of kin
- **extended family**: variable meaning.
 - Often, family with three or more generations living together
 - Or, two or more nuclear families living together
 - Or, a nuclear family with additional relatives living together
- **collateral family**: family with multiple siblings living together, with their spouses and kids
 - that is, all your aunts, uncles, or both living together
 - with their spouses

- and their kids: you and your cousins
- **family** refers to two different things:
 - **family of orientation**: family one is raised in, usually one's parents and siblings
 - **family of procreation**: family one forms with a spouse, including one's children
- descent: how you classify ancestors and descendants
 - **patrilineal descent**: emphasizes male line and relatives
 - as we do for surnames
 - as my father does when he pursues genealogy
 - he follows up ancestors of male ancestors
 - he thinks of female ancestors as marrying into the family from outside
 - for him, the ancestry of his female ancestors is rarely worth pursuing
 - **matrilineal descent**: emphasizes female line and relatives
 - you are related to your mother's kin - your father just marries in
 - his relatives are not as interesting or important to you
 - as Trobriand Islanders do
 - even denying that males contribute more than a little “food” to a fetus
 - **bilateral descent**: emphasizes both male and female lines
 - as we do in recognizing equal relatedness to both father and mother's relatives
 - as in “uncle” for both mother's brother and father's brother
- note: knowing that a society is matrilineal or patrilineal does not necessarily tell you much about how much power men or women have
- note that a society can apply different descent systems for different purposes
 - inheritance of property might be patrilineal
 - inheritance of religious or clan affiliation might be matrilineal
 - surnames might be bilateral
 - Maria Vargas marries John Smith and becomes Maria Vargas Smith
 - possibly all in one society...
- kinds **descent groups**
 - these are a subset of kin groups in general
 - **lineage**: people related by descent from a known shared ancestor
 - **patrilineage**: people related through fathers (in US, the people born with a given surname, like “the Smiths”)
 - theoretically traceable to a known male founding ancestor
 - **matrilineage**: people related through their mothers
 - theoretically to a known female founding ancestor
 - **clan**: like a lineage, but the founder is too far back for people to trace their known genealogies back that far
 - the founder may be mythical, even an animal or other non-human
 - a non-human founding ancestor is a **totem**
 - eagle clan, lightning clan...
 - clan membership may be matrilineal or patrilineal
 - example: Scottish clans

- MacAlays, Fitzpatricks, etc.
- patrilineal, identified by last name
- theoretically descended from some shared, founding ancestor, but most or all cannot actually trace ancestry to such a person
- since early 1800's, also identified by a shared tartan (plaid pattern in cloth)
- if you are a Fitzpatrick and meet someone wearing the Fitzpatrick tartan, you immediately feel kinship with him/her
- rules about who you can marry:
 - **incest**: prohibited in all societies
 - except special cases like within some royal families, Egyptian pharaohs, etc.
 - one of the very few apparent universals in human culture
 - but specifically *which* relatives are considered too close to marry varies
 - some societies see cousins (parent's sibling's kids) as too close, thus incestuous
 - other societies see cousins as the *ideal* marriage partners - not too close to marry, but not strangers, either - still within the trusted circle of well-connected relatives
 - note that the genetic risk of first cousin marriage is pretty small
 - only serious if a seriously harmful recessive allele (gene) is present
 - in that case, a child of a first cousin marriage will have a 1/16 (6.25%) chance of being affected
 - not good, but not disastrous, either
 - a 2002 meta-study (Bennett, Motulsky, et al., *Journal of Genetic Counseling*) found that first-cousin marriages have about a 1.7 to 2.8% higher risk of producing children with genetic disorders than do marriages of non-relatives
 - first cousin marriage is legal in about half of the US states
 - fully allowed: 19 states, including California
 - limited (requires counseling, older couples, etc.): 15
 - not allowed: 16 states
 - no other western country prohibits first cousin marriage
 - the Lakher (or Mara, of Mizoram in easternmost India) are extremely patrilineal; a child is not considered related to mother's relatives at all
 - if a boy's mother divorces, remarries, and has a daughter with a different man, the daughter is not related to the boy through any male relatives
 - so he can marry her - what we would consider incest between half-siblings
 - point: even the prohibition of incest, a cultural universal, is culturally constructed
- **exogamy**: rule that you must marry outside of your own group
 - must specify what group is meant
 - matrilineage exogamy (marry outside your matrilineage)
 - clan exogamy (marry outside your clan)
 - village exogamy (marry outside your village)
 - etc.
- **endogamy**: rule that you must marry within your own group
 - again, must specify what group is meant
- rules may combine both exogamy and endogamy

- as in clan endogamy with village exogamy, etc.
 - Economic aspects of marriage
 - **bridewealth** (formerly called **brideprice**): payment from groom or groom's relatives to relatives of bride
 - compensates the bride's relatives for the loss of her company, work, property, and future children
 - often incurs long-term obligations
 - Trobriand Islanders example: groom's matrilineage pays bridewealth to bride's matrilineage
 - groom has to get his matrilineal relatives to loan him this wealth
 - he then has to pay them back
 - they won't make the loans if they don't think the marriage will last
 - he will stick with the marriage, since he has to repay, regardless
 - he is grateful to his relatives for helping him to marry
 - they support his efforts to pay back the loan
 - social bonds are built...
 - adds to stability of marriage
 - prevents marriages where groom has few resources himself and/or lacks support for the marriage from relatives
 - creates bonds of appreciation and debt between the relatives
 - may have to be repaid in case of early divorce - incentive not to divorce
 - remember how economic exchange is embedded in social relationships – that an exchange creates an obligation, thus a relationship?
 - here, the economic obligations create and strengthen the social relationship between bride and groom, and especially between the bride's family and the groom's family
 - **brideservice**: work the groom has to do for the bride's relatives (usually her parents)
 - **dowry**: goods, wealth that the bride brings into the marriage
 - in societies where women are highly valued, usually little or no dowry, just personal items for her own family life
 - in societies where women are less valued, often large dowry
 - it is compensation to the groom and/or groom's family for accepting the responsibility of caring for the bride
 - **partible inheritance**: family (or one side's) land, etc. is divided up among heirs
 - often leads to conflict over the division of property
 - ever-smaller plots, need to marry to get additional land, etc.
 - **impartible inheritance**: family (or one side's) land, etc. must stay together, goes entirely to one heir
 - a common form is **primogeniture**: all of the inheritance goes to the first-born son
 - means other children have to make it on their own, through other careers, marriage, etc.
 - allows for continuing large holdings, facilitates long-term aristocracy (as in England)
- **Residence**: where a newly married couple lives
 - **virilocal** (sometimes imprecisely "**patrilocal**"): lives with groom's relatives
 - as in Chinese case

- **uxorilocal** (sometimes imprecisely “**matrilocal**”): lives with bride’s relatives
 - as in Ju/’hoansi case
- **neolocal**: sets up household apart from both sets of relatives
- Crucial in the economic exchange aspect of marriage
- Crucial for which relatives are most involved in rearing children - and have claims on them
- Dou Donggo (Sumbawa, Indonesia) example (Monaghan & Just pp. 83-84)
 - groom’s family pays part of bridewealth (see below) to bride’s family
 - newlyweds live in the house of the bride’s parents until her first child (uxorilocal / matrilocal)
 - groom works for bride’s father as brideservice (see below)
 - wife has first child in a familiar place, with mother handy
- then the groom’s family pays the rest of the bridewealth
 - the couple moves out to their own house (becomes neolocal)
 - usually near the groom’s family (broadly virilocal / patrilocal)
 - that is, the transaction is completed
 - the full bridewealth and brideservice has been paid by the groom’s relatives and the groom
 - the bride has demonstrated that she will, in fact, produce children for the groom’s people
 - the bride is transferred from her relatives to the groom’s relatives
- These rules concerning marriage can have effects far beyond individual families
 - consider the British Empire
 - its marriage and inheritance rules contributed to its formation and persistence
 - patrilineal descent
 - virilocal (patrilocal) residence
 - impartible inheritance, specifically primogeniture
 - with the practice of the second son usually going into the military
 - third usually going into the clergy
 - any additional sons into commerce...
 - this set up conditions for a durable, wealthy aristocracy run by lines of first sons
 - living on large estates that had been owned by generations of their ancestors, a seemingly legitimate and permanent situation
 - this aristocracy would have interests in a strong state and military for internal stability, to maintain their positions
 - and set up conditions for an empire
 - created a military led by well-educated men from privileged backgrounds
 - who would tend to sympathize with the aristocracy’s interests, and to have their support
 - but would also have interests in military exploits and foreign venture that could gain them their own wealth, too
 - leading to imperial expansion
- Kinds of marriages and families
 - **monogamous (monogamy)**: a person may have one spouse at a time
 - typically one man and one woman at a time

- but also other pairs of different gender identities
 - legal or not, two gay men can be monogamous, for example
- **serial monogamy**: one spouse at a time, but OK to divorce and remarry
- **polygamous (polygamy)**: a person may have more than one spouse at a time
 - **polygynous (polygyny)**: one man, multiple women
 - **polyandrous (polyandry)**: one woman, multiple men
 - plus more complex combinations of genders...
- Murdoch 1949 study comparing several hundred societies
 - 18% allow only monogamy
 - 82% allow monogamy and polygyny
 - <.05% allow polyandry
- Ford and Beach 1951 study of 185 societies
 - 84% of societies allow monogamy and polygyny
- polygyny is allowed in a majority of societies, but is usually not common
 - only a small percentage of families are actually polygynous
 - most families are monogamous, even where polygyny is allowed
 - because if many men had multiple wives, many other men would have no wife at all
 - a society with a large subset of sexually frustrated men with no family, children, heirs, or long-term future might not be very stable...
 - having multiple spouses may require more wealth or work
 - typically, only well-off men can afford to maintain multiple wives
 - Islam allows a man up to 4 wives, but requires him to provide for each equally and decently
 - often creates tensions within families, even in societies where it is allowed
 - in conservative Iraqi Muslim families, first wives usually resist additional wives, especially at first - jealousy, etc.
 - but in many societies, women are not always against polygyny
 - in the same Iraqi Muslim families, many women approve of polygyny because
 - it prevents divorce by allowing a man to take a younger wife without divorcing the first wife
 - it allows a widow to become a second wife, providing her with necessary economic support and restoring her to a viable role in society
 - in many African polygynous groups
 - first wives want younger wives to do some of the work for them
 - but younger wives often cause conflict and jealousy, because the husband might prefer the new, younger wife
- In a speech in February of 2004, President G. W. Bush supported a constitutional amendment defining marriage as a union between one man and one woman.
 - He complained that “After...millennia of human experience, a few judges and local authorities are presuming to change the most fundamental institution of civilization.”
 - do you see some naïve realism here?
 - **naïve realism**: the assumption that an idea, value, practice, etc. is inherently human, “real”, thus universal, rather than culturally constructed, thus arbitrary and variable