

Family, kinship, and descent

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- So, we have seen that gender identity is socially constructed
 - that leads us naturally to marriage and sex
 - which then leads us to descent
 - **descent**: rules to identify and categorize ancestors and offspring
 - which leads us to kinship
 - **kinship**: rules to categorize and interact with ancestors, offspring, and other relatives (our **kin**)
 - which in turn plays a big role in creating personal identities and structuring marriages and families
 - remember that “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
 - meaning:
 - many forms are possible
 - nature does not define how marriages and families are set up
 - cultures develop any of many possible solutions
 - so the forms of marriage, families, and how we name and handle relations with other kin are variable from one culture to the next
 - in our culture, we think of (or construct) marriage as being
 - a personal choice made by two people
 - mostly having to do with romantic love, sex, and friendship
 - this reflects our egocentric concept of personhood in general
 - many, if not most, societies see marriage very differently
 - as a relationship established between two groups of kin
 - not just the couple
 - marriages are often negotiated by the families of the bride and groom
 - the couple may or may not have much say
 - often the bride or groom can make suggestions about potential partners that the families take as starting points for negotiation
 - or can veto suggestions made by their families
 - in some societies, the families can make arrangements before the bride or groom are even born... like the Ju/’hoansi
 - the families typically negotiate exchanges of goods and/or labor between the groups
 - or make choices based on political alliances
 - or make choices based on how the marriage will affect the social status of the families
 - the kin groups then have obligations towards each other

- obligations to raise the children
- rights to the labor of one or both spouses and/or the children, etc.
- obligation to replace 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 deceased 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 deceased husband's brother
 - this is the practice of **levirate**
 - these practices can salvage the complex economic, political, and social commitments that were negotiated between the two families
 - if a man dies right after his wedding binds two families together, it makes sense for his brother to step in and replace him...
 - why blow a crucial, once-in-a-generation deal just because a young person died?
 - and who has a social identity that is more like a young man than his brother?
 - who has exactly the same family relations as the deceased groom
- this reflects a more sociocentric concept of personhood
 - in which your identity and behavior depend crucially on your position in social networks, especially of your kin
 - 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
 - versus European tradition, in which a "wet nurse" was little more than a servant
 - certainly not a mother
 - if even who counts as your mother is culturally constructed, clearly kinship is not made up simply of biological facts
 - kinship: 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 with your father the same way as you interact with his brother (your uncle)?
- **family**: meaning depends on context, but we will use “family” to mean an economic and residential group involving ties of sex, childrearing, and kinship
 - even this is a simplification, since in some societies, family members do not live together
 - a man may spend years away working, at sea, at war, etc.
 - or men may live together in a men’s house, not with wives and kids
 - and so on...
- In most cultures, a person lives in at least two families during their life:
 - **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
- **nuclear family**: parents and children (including adoptees: **fictive kinship**)
 - In the US, we typically see the nuclear families as a 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... etc.
- **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
 - they think (or thought) that males contribute little 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 “aunt” meaning both mother’s sister and father’s sister
 - we consider the relationship to be the same on both the father’s and the mother’s side
- a society can use different descent systems for different purposes
 - inheritance of property might be patrilineal
 - inheritance of religious or clan affiliation might be matrilineal
 - inheritance of surnames might be bilateral
 - Maria Vargas marries John Smith and becomes Maria Vargas Smith
 - possibly all in one society...

- so it is not very clear when someone says “society X is patrilineal”, because we have to ask “Patrilineal for what? Inheritance? Social rank? Family name?...”
- “matrilineal” and “patrilineal” describe descent systems, not power relations
- they say nothing about whether a society is “patriarchal” (men have power) or “matriarchal” (women have power)
- there are many societies with generally matrilineal descent for family names, property, status, etc., but strongly patriarchal distribution of power
 - Trobriand Islands: Chiefs are men (patriarchal distribution of power), but men inherit their chiefships from their mother’s family (matrilineal descent)
 - eldest male of the village’s highest-ranked matrilineage is the chief
- kinds of **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
 - MacAulays, Fitzpatricks, etc.
 - patrilineal, identified by last name
 - theoretically descended from some shared, founding ancestor, but most or all cannot actually trace ancestry to a specific 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 first 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
 - many Americans think that first-cousin marriage is not only repugnant, but also dangerous
 - Americans generally think that cousins risk having children with genetic disorders

- But in fact, the genetic risk of first cousin marriage is pretty small
 - 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
 - This is part of how we construct our ideas of marriage and incest
 - Using supposedly medical (but really unfounded) beliefs to rationalize an essentially arbitrary cultural construct
- first cousin marriage is legal in about half of the US states
 - fully allowed: 19 states, including California
 - limited (requires counseling before approval, or only allowed for older couples, etc.): 15 states
 - not allowed: 16 states
- no other western country prohibits first cousin marriage
- extreme example of cultural construction of incest rules: the Lakher (or Mara, of Mizoram in easternmost India)
 - extremely patrilineal
 - a child is not considered related to its mother's relatives at all
 - if a boy's mother divorces, remarries, and has a daughter with a different man...
 - the two children of the same mother are not related through any male relative
 - so they are not related at all
 - so they can marry
 - 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 exogamy with village endogamy, 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
 - his wife's brothers will help him pay back over time

- the wife, not the husband, owns the farmland
- and her brothers work on it, and have to give her some of the resulting yams as payment
- the groom will use some of these to pay back his loans
- groom’s matrilineal relatives 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 matrilineal relatives for helping him to marry
- his new relatives through his wife 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. stays 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** (often imprecisely called “**patrilocal**”): lives with groom’s relatives
 - as in Chinese case
 - may mean literally in the same household
 - or may mean in a new household, located near the groom’s relatives
 - [“patrilocal” is technically incorrect because both bride and groom have a father (“pater”). “Viri” refers unambiguously to the man in the marriage, and thus his relatives.]
 - **uxorilocal** (often imprecisely called “**matrilocal**”): lives with bride’s relatives
 - as in Ju/’hoansi case

- again, may be literally with them, or just near them
- **neolocal**: sets up household apart from both sets of relatives
- Residence is crucial in the economic exchange aspect of marriage
- Residence is also 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 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
 - 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
 - this also 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 ventures that could gain them their own wealth, too
 - providing motivation and means for 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
 - in some Native American societies, man and berdache
 - US: two gay men
 - legally in some states (legally: **de jure**)
 - actually anywhere (in practice but not in law: **de facto**)
- **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
 - (this is an *ethnological* study, based on many *ethnographies*)
 - 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
 - it is commonly allowed, but less commonly practiced
 - only a small percentage of families are actually polygynous
 - most families are monogamous, even where polygyny is allowed
 - because 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 well
 - Also 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...
- often creates tensions within families, even in societies where it is allowed
 - in conservative Iraqi Muslim families (like those described in *Guests of the Sheik*), first wives usually resist additional wives, especially at first - jealousy, etc.
 - older wives may gang up to make the newest, youngest wife miserable
- but in many societies, women are not always against polygyny
 - in those 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
- Why not taking Intro to Anthropology can make you look ignorant:

- 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, and opposed allowing same-sex marriages
 - He complained that “After...millennia of human experience, a few judges and local authorities are presuming to change the most fundamental institution of civilization.”
- Just this month, at a hearing about repealing the “Defense of Marriage Act” (which denies Federal benefits to same-sex couples who marry legally)
 - ‘Sen. Charles Grassley of Iowa, the committee's top Republican, laid out the argument for his party. "For thousands of years, across all cultures and nations, marriage was exclusively a heterosexual institution," he said, because of "obvious biological realities" and "the universal religious view that marriage was about procreation and child-bearing.”
 - San Francisco Chronicle, 11/11/2011
- do you see some naïve realism in these statements?
- **naïve realism**: the assumption that an idea, value, practice, etc. of one’s own culture is inherent to humans or the natural world,
 - thus real and universal,
- rather than culturally constructed,
 - thus arbitrary and variable