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 by which we identify and categorize our ancestors and offspring
- which leads 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 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

- variable from one culture to the next
- we think of (or construct) 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 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.
    - 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
− 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?
− 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 only 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)?

**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
    - 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 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 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 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
      – 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
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. 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