Marriage and Family

- What is meant when we say marriage?
- Kottak argues that there is no universal definition of marriage because a few societies apparently break the definition.
- Ember and Ember disagree, they believe that there is a way to define marriage that is more or less universal.

Marriage and Family

- Ember and Ember define marriage as: “a socially approved sexual and economic union, usually between a woman and a man. It is presumed, by both the couple and others, to be more or less permanent, and it subsumes reciprocal rights and obligations between two spouses and between spouses and their future children.”

Marriage and Family

- George Peter Murdock noted: “Sexual relations can occur without economic cooperation, and there can be sexual division of labor between men and women without sex. But marriage unites the economic with the sexual.”
The Nayar Exception?

- Are there exceptions?
- Kottak mentions the Nayar of Southern India as a group that doesn't have marriage
- The Nayar were part of the Indian caste system
- The men went off to war for long periods of time, while women stayed home.

The Nayar Exception?

- Women and men did get married but they rarely if ever saw each other after the marriage
- For procreation women took many lovers of equal or higher caste status
- Children were cared for by the mother's family and the children belonged to the mother's family

The Nayar Exception?

- Men who agreed that they were the fathers would send money and other gifts to help the mother, and pay for the midwife, but he was not responsible for the child
- According to this system the Nayar would break the definition, however the Nayar were a caste, not a society, and therefore do not invalidate the definition
Why is marriage universal?

- Why is marriage universal?
- Four possibilities
  - Gender division of labor
  - Prolonged infant dependency
  - Sexual competition
  - Postpartum requirements

How to get married

- There is a huge amount of variation in the way people get married cross-culturally
- Non-ceremonial examples:
  - Ache- wake up next to the fire
  - Trobriand Islanders- sleep together for a while and be seen in public

How to get married

- Non-complex ceremonial examples:
  - The Kwoma of New Guinea- trial marriage followed by a brief ceremony
How to get married

- Complex ceremonial examples:
  - Feasting is a common element in these types of marriages
  - Modern Episcopal weddings in the Southern U.S.

Economic aspects of marriage

75% of all known societies have some economic exchange take place around marriage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bride Service</th>
<th>Bride Price</th>
<th>Exchange of Females</th>
<th>Gift Exchange</th>
<th>Dowry</th>
<th>Indirect Dowry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Economic aspects of marriage

- Bride Price: payments made by the groom's family to the family of the bride. The price can be money, items or some combination
- Example: The Nuer of Sudan pay a number of cows for the right to marry a girl
- Occurs in horticultural or pastoral societies that lack social stratification where women contribute a great deal to subsistence, but men are the primary decision makers
Economic aspects of marriage

- **Bride service**- similar to bride wealth, but the groom provides services to the bride's family.
  - Example: The Yanomamo of Venezuela- men are required to spend from marriage to first birth working for the bride's father.
  - Occurs most commonly in egalitarian foraging or horticultural groups.

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Economic aspects of marriage

- **Exchange of females**- a custom where sisters or other female relatives are reciprocally exchanged between men.
  - Example: The Shuar of Ecuador, men who want to create a trading relation will often trade sisters to cement the relationship.
  - These societies tend to be egalitarian horticulturists where women contribute greatly to the daily subsistence efforts.

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Economic aspects of marriage

- **Gift exchange**- both kin groups exchange approximately equal value gifts for the duration the engagement up until marriage.
  - Example: the Andaman Islanders- both kin groups send gifts through an intermediary until the boy and girl get married.
  - Generally occurs in egalitarian horticultural groups.
Economic aspects of marriage

- Dowry: transfers of wealth or property from the bride's family to the bride, the groom's family, or to the bride's children.
- Example: Renaissance Europe—dowry usually came in the granting of land to the bride which the husband subsequent children farmed.
- Where does dowry occur? Steve Gaulin and James Boster conducted a cross-cultural study of dowry and here are the results:

Gaulin and Boster (1990)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stratification</th>
<th>Non-stratified</th>
<th>Non-stratified</th>
<th>Stratified</th>
<th>Stratified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td>Polygamous</td>
<td>Monogamous</td>
<td>Polygamous</td>
<td>Monogamous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dowry absent</td>
<td>624</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dowry present</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How to interpret Gaulin and Boster:

- Men usually compete for wives (bride wealth) and dilute their differential attractiveness by acquiring more wives (polygyny).
- When there exists real differences in the resources controlled by men undiluted by the acquisition of additional wives, then women will compete for husbands.
- Dowry is a form of female-female competition in societies with low female autonomy. Other forms: income, fashion.
Economic aspects of marriage

- Indirect dowry: the dowry is provided by the bride’s family to the bride, but the payments to the bride originate from the groom’s family. The groom’s family gives the payments to the bride’s father who then gives the payments to the bride.

- Example: The Basseri of southern Iran: the payments to the bride’s father get translated into household goods for the newly wed couple.