

Marriage and Family

- George Peter Murdock (1968) 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.”

Marriage and Family

- What is meant when we say marriage?
- Some argue 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

- “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.” (Ember and Ember 2000)

The Nayar Exception?

- Are there exceptions?
- Nayar of Southern India are a group that may not 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

The Nayar Exception?

- 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 once seen in public a couple is married

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

Bride Price-

- Payments made by the groom's family to the family of the bride.
 - The price can be money, items or some combination
- 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

Bride Price Example

- The Nuer of Sudan pay a number of cows for the right to marry a girl



Bride Service

- Similar to bride wealth, but the groom provides services to the bride's family.
- Example: The Yanomamo of Venezuela- Occurs most commonly in egalitarian foraging and/or horticultural groups

Exchange of Females

- A custom where sisters or other female relatives are reciprocally exchanged between men
- Example: The Shuar of Ecuador
- These societies tend to be egalitarian horticulturalists where women contribute greatly to the daily subsistence efforts

Gift Exchange

- Both kin groups exchange approximately equal value gifts for the duration the engagement up until marriage
- Example: the Andaman Islanders -
- Generally occurs in egalitarian horticultural groups

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: Turkish dowry of a chest of household items and carpets. Items can latter be sold



Dowry

- Where does dowry occur? Steve Gaulin and James Boster (1990) conducted a cross-cultural study of dowry and here are the results:

Gaulin and Boster 1990

Cross-tabulation of Presence of Dowry by Stratification

and Marriage system			

Gaulin and Boster 1990

- 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

Gaulin and Boster 1990

- Dowry is a form of female-female competition in societies with low female autonomy. Other forms: income, fashion

Indirect Dowry

- The dowry is provided by the bride's family to the bride
- 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-

Whom can we marry?

- Two basic rules for whom we can marry:
- Endogamy- a rule prescribing that one must marry within one's own kin group
- Example- Indian Caste system
- Occurs when critical resources need to be kept within the kin group

Whom can we marry?

- Exogamy- rule prescribing marriage outside of one's kin group
- Example- Modern American marriage rules
- Example 2- Tlingit of Alaska and Canada
 - They have to marry outside of their moiety
 - Moiety- the splitting of a society into halves

Whom can we marry?

- Exogamy appears to occur when critical resources need to be accessed across groups
- Examples of critical resources-
 - Food
 - Fuel
 - Alliances

Incest Taboo

- Incest: Prohibition against sexual intercourse between certain kinds of relatives
 - The incest taboo is a cultural universal.
 - What constitutes incest varies widely from culture to culture.

Incest Taboo: Instinctive Horror

- This theory argues that Homo sapiens are genetically programmed to avoid incest.
- This theory has been refuted.
 - However, cultural universality does not necessarily entail a genetic basis (e.g. fire making).
 - If people really were genetically programmed to avoid incest, a formal incest taboo would be unnecessary.

Incest Taboo: Biological Problems

- Incest taboo developed in response to abnormal offspring born from incestuous unions.
- A decline in fertility and survival does accompany brother-sister mating across several generations.

Incest Taboo: Biological Problems

- However, human marriage patterns are based on specific cultural beliefs rather than universal concerns about biological degeneration several generations in the future.

Incest Taboo: Biological Problems

- Neither instinctive horror nor biological degeneration can explain the very widespread custom of marrying cross cousins.
- Also, fears about degeneration cannot explain why sexual unions between parallel cousins but not cross cousins is so often tabooed.

Incest Taboo: Attempt and Contempt

- Malinowski (and Freud) argued that the incest taboo originated to direct sexual feelings away from one's family to avoid disrupting the family structure and relations(familiarity increases the chances for attempt).

Incest Taboo: Attempt and Contempt

- The opposite theory argues that people are less likely to be sexually attracted to those with whom they have grown up (familiarity breeds contempt).
- This is known as the Westermarck Effect.

Incest Taboo: Attempt and Contempt

- Westermarck effect; there is some evidence from kibbutz studies in Israel
- In a kibbutz all children are cared for communally
- Very low intermarriage rates between members of kibbutzim

Incest Taboo: Marry Out or Die Out

- Incest taboo originated to ensure exogamy (Levi-Strauss).
- Incest taboos force people to create and maintain wide social networks by extending peaceful relations beyond one's immediate group.
- By marrying out one increases the number of allies for coalitional violence.

Durable alliances

- The existence of customs such as the sororate and the levirate indicate the importance of marriage as an alliance between groups.
- Sororate marriages involve the widower marrying one of his deceased wife's sisters.
- Levirate marriages involve the widow marrying one of her deceased husband's brothers.
