9

Marriage and Family

The key terms and concepts covered in this chapter, in the order in which they appear:

marriage
exogamy
endogamy

neolocal
bilocal
patrilocal
virilocal
matrilocal
uxorilocal
avunculocal
ambilocal

monogamy
polygamy
plural marriage
polygyny
polyandry
bride service

bridewealth
dowry
hypergamy

sororate
levirate

family
conjugal family
nonconjugal family
nuclear family
polygynous family
extended families
joint families
blended family
family by choice

divorce

ANTHROPOLOGICAL DISCUSSIONS of marriage and the family complement discussions of descent and round out our study of relatedness. As we saw in Chapter 8, the complexities and ambiguities of descent are many. The study of marriage and the family offers just as many complications, the first of which is how to define these terms.

9.1 What Is Marriage?

If we take what Euro-Americans call *marriage* as a prototype of a particular kind of social relationship, we discover in all societies institutions that resemble what people in the United States would call marriage. At the same time, the range of beliefs and practices associated with these institutions is broad, and the degree of overlap is not great. Nevertheless, we tend to classify all these institutions as *marriage* because of the key elements they do have in common. On these grounds, a prototypical **marriage** involves a man and a woman, transforms the status of the man and the woman, and stipulates the degree of sexual access the married partners may have to each other, ranging from exclusive to preferential. Marriage also establishes the legitimacy of children born to the wife and creates relationships between the kin of the wife and the kin of the husband.

We stress the prototypical nature of our definition because, although some societies are quite strict about allowing females to marry only males, and vice versa, other societies are not. The ethnographic literature contains many examples of marriage or marriagelike relationships that resemble the prototype in every respect except that the partners may be two men or two women (as defined according to biological sex criteria) or a living woman and the ghost of a deceased male. Sometimes these marriages involve a sexual relationship between the partners; sometimes they do not. Apparently, the institution we are calling *marriage* has been viewed by members of many societies as so useful and

valuable that they allow it to include partners of many different kinds—even though in all cases the prototype people have in mind seems to be a union between a man and a woman. Thus, the ethnographic evidence demonstrates that claims that human marriage has always been between a man and a women are simply false.

Examining the definition of marriage just offered, we note that marriage is a rite of passage: The parties go from the social status of single to the social status of married. In every society, this transformation of status is accompanied by adoption of new roles, but the rights and obligations associated with these roles vary enormously from culture to culture. Prototypically, among the rights and obligations of spouses are socially sanctioned sexual relations with each other. But, again, the nature and exclusivity of these sexual relations vary from culture to culture: Some cultures insist that the partners may have sex only with each other; some view sexual encounters outside marriage less seriously for one partner (usually the husband) than for the other partner; and at least one culture allowed the husband and wife to have sexual intercourse if they wish, but after spending one night together, they needed never see each other again.

In most cultures, it is assumed that the married partners will have children, and the institution of marriage provides the children with a legitimate ascribed social status, based on who their parents are. In some cases, it is as if the father's and the mother's statuses were plotted on a graph, allowing the status of their child to be placed precisely in the social space where the *x*- and *y*-axes intersect; in other cases, the child's status depends solely on the position of one or the other parent. In addition, in most cultures, marriage creates formal relationships between the kin of the husband and the kin of the wife. By contrast, while mating may produce grandparents, it cannot produce in-laws or a formal relationship between the parents of the father and the parents of the mother. This aspect of marriage also has important social consequences.

9.2 Whom to Marry and Where to Live

Societies use kinship systems to exercise control over the marriages contracted by their members. When marriage rules specify that a person is to marry outside a defined social group—extended family, lineage, clan, class, ethnic group, or religious sect, for example—anthropologists say that the society in question practices **exogamy** (or *out-marriage*). The opposite situation—in which a person is expected to marry *within* a defined social group—is called **endogamy**. These patterns may be obligatory (i.e., strictly enforced) or merely preferred.

Once married, the spouses must live somewhere. Anthropologists have identified six patterns of postmarital residence. **Neolocal** residence, in which the new partners set up an independent household at a place of their own choosing, should be familiar to people who have grown up in the United States, Canada, and most of Europe. Neolocal residence tends to be found in societies that are more or less individualistic in their social organization, especially those in which bilateral kindreds also are found. Neolocal residence exists throughout the world but is most common in nation-states and in societies bordering the Mediterranean Sea. Some societies with bilateral kindreds have **bilocal** residence patterns in which married partners live with (or near) either the wife's or the husband's parents. Despite this flexibility in allowing married partners to make decisions regarding where they might live, very few societies with bilocal residence have been described in the anthropological literature.

The most common residence pattern in the world, in terms of the number of societies in which it is practiced, is **patrilocal** residence in which the partners in a marriage live with (or near) the husband's father. (In older anthropological writing, the term **virilocal** is sometimes used to distinguish residing with the husband's kin from residing specifically with the husband's father, for which the term *patrilocal* was reserved.) Patrilocal residence is strongly associated with patrilineal descent systems—about 85 percent of societies in which postmarital residence is patrilocal are also patrilineal. If children are born into a patrilineage and inherit from the father or other patrilineage members, then there are advantages to rearing them among the members of the lineage.

When the partners in a marriage live with (or near) the wife's mother, anthropologists use the term **matrilocal** residence. (Again, in older anthropological writing, the term **uxorilocal** is sometimes used to refer to residence with the wife's kin, as distinct from living with the wife's mother.) Matrilocal residence is found exclusively in matrilineal societies (some matrilineal societies are patrilocal). Anthropologists who study matrilineal societies have observed that sometimes the married partners live with the husband's mother's brother. This is based on the logic of matrilineal descent in which the socially significant older male in a man's life is his mother's brother because he is a member of the man's matrilineage while his own father is not. In these cases, anthropologists use the term **avunculocal** residence, building on the word *avuncular*, meaning "of uncles." As might be expected, avunculocal residence is found only in matrilineal societies, and in contrast to matrilocal residence, it emphasizes the inheritance and labor patterns linking men in a matrilineage. A rare pattern called **ambilocal** residence is associated with ambilineal descent in which the married partners may live with either the husband's or wife's group. This term is sometimes used interchangeably with the term *bilocal* and can be used to distinguish this pattern in unilineal societies from the pattern in bilateral societies.

9.3 How Many Spouses?

You may have noticed that we use the phrase *married partners* rather than the more common *married couple*. This is because the number of people who may be married to one another at the same time also varies across cultures. The major distinction is between societies that permit more than one spouse to a person and those that do not. A marriage pattern that permits a person to be married to only one spouse at a time is called **monogamy**. The term can also be used to refer to any marriage in which one person has only one spouse.

The term **polygamy** is used to refer to marriage patterns in which a person may have more than one spouse, a practice also sometimes called **plural marriage**. Polygamy has two major forms: polygyny and polyandry. **Polygyny** is a marriage pattern in which a man may be married to more than one woman at a time. It is the most common of all marriage patterns in the world in terms of number of societies in which it is permitted. Polygyny enables a lineage, especially one with male children, to establish alliances with many other lineages through marriage.

In polygynous societies, it should be noted, not every man has more than one wife. In Islamic societies, for example, a man is permitted to have as many as four wives, but only on the condition that he can support them all equally well. Today, some Muslim authorities argue that "equal support" must be emotional as well as material. Furthermore, convinced that no man can feel exactly the same toward each of his wives, they have concluded that monogamy must be the rule. Other polygynous societies set no limit on the number of wives a man can marry. However, regardless of any limitations on the number of wives, polygynous societies are faced with a real demographic problem: Because the number of men and women in any society is approximately equal, for every man with two wives, there is one man without a wife. To help solve this problem, men may be obliged to wait until they are older to marry, and women may be pressed to marry at a very young age; but even these practices do not completely eliminate the imbalance. As a result, polygyny is regularly connected with power in societies that practice it. That is, those men who are rich and powerful have multiple wives; those men who are poor and powerless either cannot marry, marry very late, have relationships outside of marriage, or marry women who are equally dispossessed.

Polyandry, a pattern in which a woman is married to more than one man at a time, is the rarest of the three marriage patterns. In some polyandrous societies, a woman may marry several brothers. In others, she may marry men who are not related to one another and who all will live together in a single household. The tendency in polyandrous societies—especially in those in which a woman marries a set of brothers—is to intensify the connections between lineages and to limit the number of potential heirs in the next generation because, no matter how many husbands a woman has, there is a limit to the number of offspring she can bear. (Table 9.1 lists basic marriage patterns.)

TABLE 9.1 Marriage Patterns

MONOGAMY	POLYGAMY
Monogamy	Polygyny Polyandry

9.4 Marriage as Alliance

In most societies, a marriage is an alliance between two families or lineages, not merely between two individuals, and it frequently requires traditional exchanges of wealth to legitimize it. These are usually characterized as bride service, bridewealth (or bride "price"), and dowry. In some societies, the prospective groom must work for the family of the bride for a predetermined length of time before they may marry, a practice called **bride service**. Other societies solemnize marriages with an exchange of **bridewealth**: certain symbolically important goods that are transferred from the immediate family of the groom (or his lineage) to the family of the bride (or her lineage) on the occasion of their marriage. *Symbolically important goods* include those things that are considered to be appropriate for exchange at a marriage in a specific society—for example, cattle, cash, shell ornaments, cotton cloth, or bird feathers. Bridewealth exchange is most common in patrilineal societies that combine agriculture, pastoralism, and patrilocal postmarital residence. Through their research in societies that exchange bridewealth, anthropologists have found that it is fundamentally incorrect to think of bridewealth as "buying" a wife. Rather, anthropologists view bridewealth as a way of compensating the bride's relatives for the loss of her labor and childbearing capacities. That is, when the bride goes to live with her husband and his lineage, she will be working and producing children for his people, not her own.

Bridewealth transactions create affinal relations between the relatives of the wife and those of the husband. The wife's relatives in turn use the bridewealth they receive for her to find a bride for her brother in yet another kinship group. In many societies in eastern and southern Africa, a woman gains power and influence over her brother because the cattle that her marriage brings allow him to marry and continue their lineage.

Dowry, by contrast, is typically a transfer of family wealth, usually from parents to their daughter, at the time of her marriage. It is found primarily in the agricultural societies of Europe and Asia, but it has been brought to some parts of Africa with the arrival of religions like Islam that support the practice. In societies in which both men and women are seen as heirs to family wealth, dowry is sometimes regarded as the way women receive their inheritance. Dowries often are considered the wife's contribution to the establishment of a new household to which the husband may bring other forms of wealth or prestige. In stratified societies, the size of a woman's dowry frequently ensures that when she marries, she will continue to enjoy her accustomed style of life. In some stratified societies, an individual of lower status sometimes marries an individual of higher status, a situation in which the children will take on the higher status. This practice is called **hypergamy**, and it is usually one in which the lower-status person is the wife and the dowry is seen (sometimes explicitly) as an exchange for the higher social position that the husband confers.

The ties that link kinship groups through marriage are sometimes so strong that they endure beyond the death of one of the partners. In some matrilineal and some patrilineal societies, if a wife dies young, the husband's line will ask the deceased wife's line for a substitute, often her sister. This practice, called the **sororate** (from the Latin *soror*, "sister"), is connected with both alliance strength and bridewealth. That is, both lines—that of the widower and that of the deceased wife—wish to maintain the alliance formed (and frequently continued) by the marriage. At the same time, if a man marries the sister of his deceased wife, the bridewealth that his line gave to the line of the first wife will not have to be returned, so the disruption caused by the wife's death will be lessened. In many societies, if the husband dies, the wife may (and in rare cases be obligated to) marry one of his brothers. This practice, called the **levirate** (from the Latin *levir*, "husband's brother"), is intended, like the sororate, to maintain the alliance between descent groups. In some societies, it also functions as a kind of social security system for widows, who might otherwise be destitute after the death of their husbands.

9.5 Family

Marriage frequently is understood, both by scholars and by the people who marry, as creating families. *Family* is another term that seeks to label a practice that is apparently universal but so variable as to make definition difficult. One minimal definition of a **family** would be that it consists of a woman and her dependent children. Some anthropologists prefer to distinguish the **conjugal family**, which is a family based on marriage—at its minimum, a husband and wife (a spousal pair) and their children—from the **nonconjugal family**, which consists of a woman and her children. In a nonconjugal family, the husband/father may be occasionally present or completely absent. Anthropologists note that nonconjugal families are never the only form of family organization in a society and, in fact, are usually rather infrequent. However, in some large-scale industrial societies, including the United States, nonconjugal families have become increasingly common. In most societies, the conjugal family is coresident—that is, spouses live in the same dwelling, along with their children—but in some matrilineal societies, the husband lives with his matrilineage, the wife and children live with theirs, and the husband visits his wife and children.

Families can be characterized according to their structure. The neolocal, monogamous family is called the **nuclear family** and is composed of two generations, the parents and their unmarried children. In the nuclear family, each member has a series of evolving relationships with every other member: husband and wife, parents and children, and children with one another. These are the principal lines along which jealousy, controversy, and affection develop in neolocal monogamous families.

The **polygynous family** is composed of the husband, his cowives, and their children. The polygynous family adds complexity in the older generation not found in the nuclear family—the relationships among the cowives and the relationship of the group of wives with the single husband. Additional complexity arises in the younger generation as children have connections to half-siblings (the same father but a different mother) and full siblings (the same father and same mother), as well as an additional set of adults in their lives—their mother's cowives. These differences make the internal dynamics of polygynous families different from those of nuclear families.

The two family structures discussed so far are similar in that they are two generations in depth and involve one set of spouses (a man and a woman in the nuclear family, a man and his wives in a polygynous one). When families include a third generation—parents, married children, and grandchildren—anthropologists speak about **extended families**. When families maintain a two-generation depth but expand outward so that a set of siblings and their spouses and children lives together, anthropologists talk about **joint families**. Simply put, a joint family is composed of several brothers and their wives and children or several sisters and their husbands and children. In societies in which they are found, extended and joint families are ideal patterns, which means that although people might want to live that way, not everyone is able to.

In recent years in the United States, anthropologists have observed the emergence of new family types. The **blended family** occurs when previously divorced people marry, bringing with them children from their previous marriages. The internal dynamics of the new family—which can come to include his children, her children, and their children—may sometimes have some similarities to the dynamics of polygynous families. Specifically, the relations among the children and their relations to each parent may be complex and negotiated over time. (Table 9.2 summarizes the basic family types.)

A second new form is the **family by choice**, a term used by some LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) people to refer to families that are not the product of heterosexual marriage. Derived from a model that resembles kinship based on nurturance (defined in Chapter 8), some North American LGBT people argue that "whatever endures is real." As a result, the group of people that endures—which may include some or all of the kin of each member of the couple, their close friends, and children of either member or children who may be adopted—forms a family. LGBT activists have used this model as a resource in their struggle to obtain for long-standing families of choice some of the same legal rights enjoyed by traditional heterosexual families, such as hospital visiting privileges, partner insurance coverage, joint adoption, and property rights.

TABLE 9.2 Types of Families

NONCONJUGAL FAMILIES	CONJUGAL FAMILIES	FAMILIES BY CHOICE
Mother and children	Nuclear Polygynous Extended Joint Blended	Enduring ties that are not the product of heterosexual marriage

Marriages do not always last forever, and almost all societies make it possible for married couples to **divorce**—that is, to dissolve the marriage in a socially recognized way, regulating the status of those who were involved with the marriage and any offspring of the marriage. In some societies, it is not merely the people who were married who are involved in the divorce; it may also include other family or lineage members of the divorcing parties whose relationships are also changed by the divorce. In societies in which bridewealth is part of the marriage ceremony, for example, divorce may cause difficulties if the bridewealth must be returned. In such societies, a man who divorces a wife or whose wife leaves him expects her family to return to him some of the bridewealth he offered in exchange for her. But the wife's family may well have exchanged the bridewealth they received when she married to obtain wives for her brothers. As a result, her brothers' marriages may have to be broken up in order to recoup enough bridewealth from their in-laws to repay their sister's ex-husband or his line. Sometimes a new husband will repay the bridewealth to the former husband's line, thus letting the bride's relatives off the hook.

Grounds for divorce vary from society to society as does which party may initiate divorce. Common grounds for divorce often include nagging, quarreling, cruelty, violence, stinginess, and adultery. Cross-culturally, a frequent ground for divorce is childlessness.

Families break apart and new households form in other ways besides divorce. In joint families, for example, the pressures that build up among coresident brothers or sisters often increase dramatically on the death of the father. In theory, the eldest son inherits the position of head of household from his father, but his younger brothers may not accept his authority as readily as they did the father's. Some younger brothers may decide to establish their own households, and so the joint family gradually splits. Each brother whose household splits off from the joint stem usually hopes to start his own joint family; eventually, his sons will bring their wives into the household, and a new joint family emerges out of the ashes of an old one.

For Further Reading

Many of the readings for Chapter 8 also deal with marriage and family. Here are some readings specific to these topics:

MARRIAGE

Goody and Tambiah 1973; Hirsch and Wardlow 2006; Levine 1988; Padilla et al. 2007; Sacks 1979; Schuler 1987

FAMILY

Netting, Wilk, and Arnould 1984; Ottenheimer 2006; Weston 1991

10

Globalization and the Culture of Capitalism

The key terms and concepts covered in this chapter, in the order in which they appear:

colonialism
neocolonialism

corvee

cultural imperialism
westernization
internal colonialism

subaltern
nationalism

modernization theory
revolutionary movements
proletarianization

dependency theory

neoliberalism
international political economy
world system theory
core
periphery
semiperiphery
deterritorialization
reterritorialization
diaspora

globalization
tourism

identity politics
cultural pluralism
multiculturalism
acculturation
cargo cults

cultural hybridization
long-distance nationalism
transborder state
transborder citizenship

human rights
cultural rights

cosmopolitanism
global assemblages
development
anthropology of the environment
nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)