

Family and Kinship

International Foundation for the Advancement
of Reflective Learning and Teaching



Family and Kinship

Diploma in Social Studies

Family and Kinship

The family is found in all cultures, although it differs in many ways from one to another. It is the basic area of life which underlies all cultures.

The study of the family, curiously enough, is not an easy study. In spite of our personal experience with it, or perhaps because of it, most of us are ill-equipped to view the family as a social phenomenon. It is too close to us, our contact with it is too intimate, to permit us to view it with objectivity.

Of all the groups that affect the lives of individuals in society none touches them so intimately or so continuously as does the family.

Family and Kinship

- The family, almost without question, is the most important of any of the groups that human experience offers. Other groups we join for longer or shorter periods of time, for the satisfaction of this interest or that.
- The family, on the contrary, is with us always.
- Or rather more precisely, we are with it. It is our family that gives us our principal identity and even our very name, which is the label of this identity in the larger society of which we are a part.

Family and Kinship

- From the moment of birth, when the young parents gaze with adoration upon their very own creation, to the moment of death, when sons and daughters are summoned to the bedside of a passing patriarch, the family exerts a constant influence.
- The family is the first social group we encounter in our inchoate experience, and it is the group with which, in one form or another, we shall have the most enduring relationship. Every one of us, with statistically small exceptions, grows up in a family and most of us too, with a few more exceptions, will be a member of a family for the larger part our lives.

Family and Kinship

- **Defining “the Family”**
- Defining “the family” is not simple if we try to include all types of family groups in all kinds of societies.
- **The family is a relatively enduring group based on mutual definition, marriage, blood descent or adoption who care for one another.**
- Great cultural diversity in family composition can be found throughout the world; much cultural anthropological research is dedicated to understanding this variation and changes over time.
- The different types of families cross-culturally and historically indicate that different forms can provide benefits for members.

Family and Kinship

- Similarly, many *one-parent* families begin as (two-parent) nuclear families that dissolve upon divorce/separation or death of one of the parents. In recent decades, one-parent families have become more common as a result of choice, divorce and births out of wedlock.
- One of the most controversial issues concerning the family today is that of gay and lesbian marriages. The Netherlands (2001) was the first country to allow same sex marriages. Same-sex marriage is permitted for example in Belgium, Canada, Norway, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, and Sweden, Iceland, Argentina and by a few states in the US. Other countries allow civil partnerships which give similar rights as marriage.

Family and Kinship

- Some people are against same-sex marriage but are supportive of civil unions. This raises questions about the difference, and therefore the meaning of marriage.
- It is somewhat ironic that same-sex couples who desire marriage are seen as threatening the institution of marriage at a time when heterosexual couples are increasingly cohabiting without marriage, and a very large percentage of children are being born to single women.

Family and Kinship

- Marriage and family are central social relationships in most societies.
- There are two kinds of relatives—**consanguines**, or people related by “blood;” and **affines**, who are related by marriage. A group organized around kinship is called a **kin group**, one type of which is the **nuclear family** of two parents and their offspring. While we may not stay in touch with members of our extended family, in traditional societies many important relationships are defined by extended family ties.
- People who reside in the same physical space are termed a **household**. In many cultures people have familial relationships with people they are not related to. Anthropologists term this “**fictive kinship**;” adoption is an example.

Family and Kinship

- Relationship Groups
- **Consanguines** are “blood” relatives —people related by birth.
- **Affines** are “in-laws” —people related by marriage.

Family and Kinship

- **Incest Taboo**
- **Incest taboos** the universal rules that prohibit sexual relations between some types of relatives.

Family and Kinship

- **Incest taboo**
- The relatives that are prohibited vary from culture to culture, but almost universally include members of the nuclear family (with a few notable exceptions). There are at least four different explanations for the universality of the incest taboo.
- Two explanations assume disinterest between close relatives, and one argues incest is disruptive to family relationships.
- Avoiding the risks of inbreeding is a popularly held explanation.
- **None of the explanations is definitive or explains the taboo in every situation.**

Family and Kinship

Inbreeding Avoidance

- Both genetic theory and experimentation have established that offspring of sexual unions between close relatives have a higher probability of inheriting harmful recessive traits

Family and Kinship

Childhood Familiarity Hypothesis

- Holds that males and females who are closely associated during childhood have little sexual desire for one another when they grow up.



Family and Kinship

- Many families are formed through marriage. Cross-culturally there are many different forms of marriage, making it very difficult to define. Widely accepted parts of a definition are that marriage regulates sexual intercourse and legitimizes children. It most frequently involves at least one man and at least one woman, from different families.

Family and Kinship

- No form of marriage or type of family is universal.
- There are unusual examples such as the Nayar of southern India, among whom men and women may not see each other again after consummating their marriage.
- The Tiwi of northern Australia are also unusual in that both men and women marry partners who belong to a different generation.

Family and Kinship

- Monogamy - one spouse.
- Polygamy - plural spouses.
 - Polygyny - one man with multiple wives.
 - Polyandry - one woman with multiple husbands.
- Group Marriage - several men and women married simultaneously to one another.

Family and Kinship

- **Polygyny** or multiple wives is the most common.
- **Polyandry** or multiple husbands. Less than 1 percent of cultures have practiced **polyandry**
- Having multiple wives is a sign of wealth and status for a man; it also extends his network of affines for political alliances and trade relationships. Multiple wives and their children provide increased labour for horticultural gardens or pastoralists herds.
- Bridewealth is often a requirement for taking a wife, and few men have the wealth necessary for more than one wife.

Family and Kinship



This is a Maasai man with his wives and children. Maasai are a cattle-herding people of Kenya and Tanzania.

Family and Kinship

- Polygyny provides a means for all women in a society to benefit from marriage and children. Co-wives share domestic labour, and marrying a man with multiple wives means there is potentially more wealth for a woman's sons to inherit.
- Polyandry is also not the predominant form of marriage, even when it is allowed. For families with more than one son, polyandry is a means of keeping the land and family together, while limiting the number of children.

Family and Kinship

- Levirate - Custom of a widow marrying a male relative of her deceased husband.
- Sororate - Custom of a widower marrying a female relative of his deceased wife.

Family and Kinship

- **Serial monogamy** is common; that is, having multiple spouses one at a time. In many cultures marriage forms permanent relationships for the couple and between their families.
- Alliances formed through marriage are important economically and politically. The importance for families helps to explain why marriages are sometimes arranged for the couple by other members of the family. Goods or services are also exchanged between families with marriage.

Family and Kinship

- Marriage Exchanges:
- Bridewealth
 - A man and his relatives transfer wealth to relatives of the bride.
- Brideservice
 - The husband spends a period of time working for the family of his bride.
- Dowry
 - The family of a woman transfers wealth to their daughter and her husband.

Family and Kinship

- Goods or services are also exchanged between families with marriage.
- These exchanges can take the form of **bridewealth**, **brideservice**, or **dowry**. In most cultures goods are transferred between families. Bridewealth, in which goods are given by the man and his relatives to the relatives of the bride, is the most common form of marital exchange.

Family and Kinship

- Dowry
- In most societies that have the dowry custom, a woman takes wealth from her family into her marriage.
- This jewelry-bedecked Pakistani bride is waiting for her wedding.



Family and Kinship

Postmarital Residence

- Influenced by inheritance patterns and economic forces.
- Influences which kinship relationships will be most emphasized in a society.

Family and Kinship

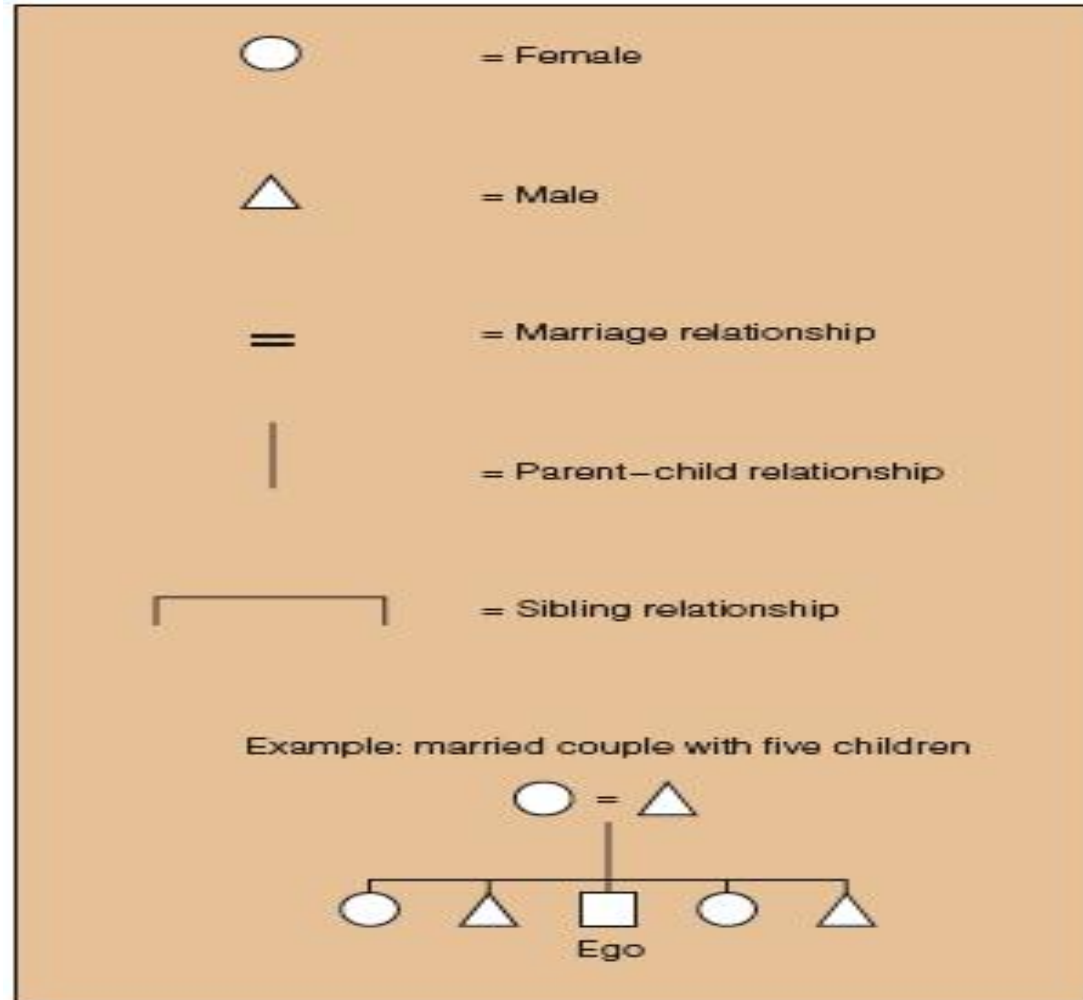
- ❑ **Postmarital** residence pattern- Where a newly married couple go to live after their marriage.
- ❑ **Patrilocal** residence - Couples live with or near the husband's parents.
- ❑ **Matrilocal** residence - Couples live with or near the wife's parents.
- ❑ **Ambilocal** residence - Postmarital residence is optional between either the wife's or the husband's kin.
- ❑ **Bilocal** residence - Postmarital residence is with either the wife's or the husband's parents according to choice.
- ❑ **Neolocal** residence - Couples establish a separate household apart from both the husband and wife's parents.
- ❑ **Avunculocal** residence - Couples live with the maternal uncle of the husband.

Family and Kinship

- Visit this website that explores the practice and viability of arranged marriage:
<http://iml.jou.ufl.edu/projects/spring07/Zuffoletti/index.html>
Evaluate the website in terms of its credibility. What evidence do you base your evaluation on?
- Explore the website for information about arranged marriages.
- Judging from the definition of arranged marriage, and the description of the process, do you think that arranged marriage has any advantages over the practice of love marriage within Western societies?
- Why or why not?
- If you question any of the information presented, explain how would you go about verifying it?

Family and Kinship

Symbols
used in
Kinship
Diagrammes



Family and Kinship

- Visit this website for European statistics:
<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/52/27/41920080.pdf>

Family and Kinship

“In India, Castes, Honor and Killings Intertwine,” by Jim Yardley. *The New York Times*, July 10, 2010, : http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/10/world/asia/10honor.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=honor%20killings%20caste&st=cse

Nirupama Pathak, a young woman who was a member of the Brahmin caste, the highest caste in India, is found dead, her mother accused of killing her. Pathak was secretly engaged to be married to a man from a lower caste and her postmortem revealed she was pregnant. Many in India feel death is justified on moral grounds when people marry outside of the caste or otherwise violate marriage traditions. Even Pathak’s father is quoted as saying it is their cultural way, that all societies have cultural rules that should be followed.

The article states that Pathak’s father wrote her a letter to convince her to change her mind about her engagement. In it he says that while India’s Constitution permits marriage outside one’s caste, the Constitution is only decades-old and Hindu law is thousands of years old. Indian society has been rapidly modernizing. Pathak, a single woman, was away from home studying in a graduate program in New Delhi. Why do you think the caste system is so resistant to change, despite other cultural changes?

Family and Kinship

- Discuss the main theories of the culturally universal incest taboo.
- Analyze why marriage is so difficult to define cross-culturally.
- Describe the major forms of marriage and the leading ideas about their causes.