Perspectives: An Open Invitation to Cultural Anthropology

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Family and Marriage

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe the variety of human families cross-culturally with examples.
- Discuss variation in parental rights and responsibilities.
- Distinguish between matrilineal, patrilineal, and bilateral kinship systems.
- Identify the differences between kinship establish by blood and kinship established by marriage.
- Evaluate the differences between dowry and bridewealth as well as between different types of post-marital residence.
- Recognize patterns of family and marriage and explain why these patterns represent rational decisions within the cultural contexts.

Family and marriage may at first seem to be familiar topics. Families exist in all societies and they are part of what makes us human. However, societies around the world demonstrate tremendous variation in cultural understandings of family and marriage. Ideas about how people are related to each other, what kind of marriage would be ideal, when people should have children, who should care for children, and many other family related matters differ cross-culturally. While the function of families is to fulfill basic human needs such as providing for children, defining parental roles, regulating sexuality, and passing property and knowledge between generations, there are many variations or patterns of family life that can meet these needs. This chapter introduces some of the more common patterns of family life found around the world. It is important to remember that within any cultural framework variation does occur. Some variations on the standard pattern fall within what would be culturally considered the "range of acceptable alternatives." Other family forms are not entirely accepted, but would still be recognized by most members of the community as reasonable.

RIGHTS, RESPONSIBILITIES, STATUSES, AND ROLES IN FAMILIES

Some of the earliest research in cultural anthropology explored differences in ideas about family. Lewis Henry Morgan, a lawyer who also conducted early anthropological studies of Native American cultures, documented the words used to describe family members in the Iroquois language.[1] In the book *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family* (1871), he explained that words used to describe family members, such as "mother" or "cousin," were important because they indicated the rights and responsibilities associated with particular family members both within households and the larger community. This can be seen in the labels we have for family members—titles like father or aunt—that describe how a person fits into a family as well as the obligations he or she has to others.

The concepts of status and role are useful for thinking about the behaviors that are expected of individuals who

occupy various positions in the family. The terms were first used by anthropologist Ralph Linton and they have since been widely incorporated into social science terminology.[2] For anthropologists, a **status** is any culturally-designated position a person occupies in a particular setting. Within the setting of a family, many statuses can exist such as "father," "mother," "maternal grandparent," and "younger brother." Of course, cultures may define the statuses involved in a family differently. **Role** is the set of behaviors expected of an individual who occupies a particular status. A person who has the status of "mother," for instance, would generally have the role of caring for her children.

Roles, like statuses, are cultural ideals or expectations and there will be variation in how individuals meet these expectations. Statuses and roles also change within cultures over time. In the not-so-distant past in the United States, the roles associated with the status of "mother" in a typical Euro-American middle-income family included caring for children and keeping a house; they probably did not include working for wages outside the home. It was rare for fathers to engage in regular, day-to-day housekeeping or childcare roles, though they sometimes "helped out," to use the jargon of the time. Today, it is much more common for a father to be an equal partner in caring for children or a house or to sometimes take a primary role in child and house care as a "stay at home father" or as a "single father." The concepts of status and role help us think about cultural ideals and what the majority within a cultural group tends to do. They also help us describe and document culture change. With respect to family and marriage, these concepts help us compare family systems across cultures.

KINSHIP AND DESCENT

Kinship is the word used to describe culturally recognized ties between members of a family. Kinship includes the terms, or social statuses, used to define family members and the roles or expected behaviors associated with these statuses. Kinship encompasses relationships formed through blood connections (consanguineal), such as those created between parents and children, as well as relationships created through marriage ties (affinal), such as in-laws (see Figure 1). Kinship can also include "chosen kin," who have no formal blood or marriage ties, but consider themselves to be family. Adoptive parents, for instance, are culturally recognized as parents to the children they raise even though they are not related by blood.

Figure 1: These young Maasai women from Western Tanzania are affinal kin, who share responsibilities for childcare. Maasai men often have multiple wives who share domestic responsibilities. Photo used with permission of Laura Tubelle de González.

While there is quite a bit of variation in families cross-culturally, it is also true that many families can be categorized into broad types based on what anthropologists call a kinship system. The **kinship system** refers to the pattern of culturally recognized relationships between family members. Some cultures create kinship through only a single parental line or "side" of the family. For instance, families in many parts of the world are defined by **patrilineal descent:** the paternal line of the family, or fathers and their children. In other societies, **matrilineal descent** defines membership in the kinship group through the maternal line of relationships between mothers and their children. Both kinds of

kinship are considered **unilineal** because they involve descent through only one line or side of the family. It is important to keep in mind that systems of descent define culturally recognized "kin," but these rules do not restrict relationships or emotional bonds between people. Mothers in patrilineal societies have close and loving relationships with their children even though they are not members of the same patrilineage.[3] In the United States, for instance, last names traditionally follow a pattern of patrilineal descent: children receive last names from their fathers. This does not mean that the bonds between mothers and children are reduced. **Bilateral descent** is another way of creating kinship. Bilateral descent means that families are defined by descent from both the father and the mother's sides of the family. In bilateral descent, which is common in the United States, children recognize both their mother's and father's family members as relatives.

As we will see below, the **descent groups** that are created by these kinship systems provide members with a sense of identity and social support. Kinship groups may also control economic resources and dictate decisions about where people can live, who they can marry, and what happens to their property after death. Anthropologists use **kinship diagrams** to help visualize descent groups and kinship. Figure 2 is a simple example of a kinship diagram. This diagram has been designed to help you see the difference between the kinship groups created by a bilateral descent system and a unilineal system.

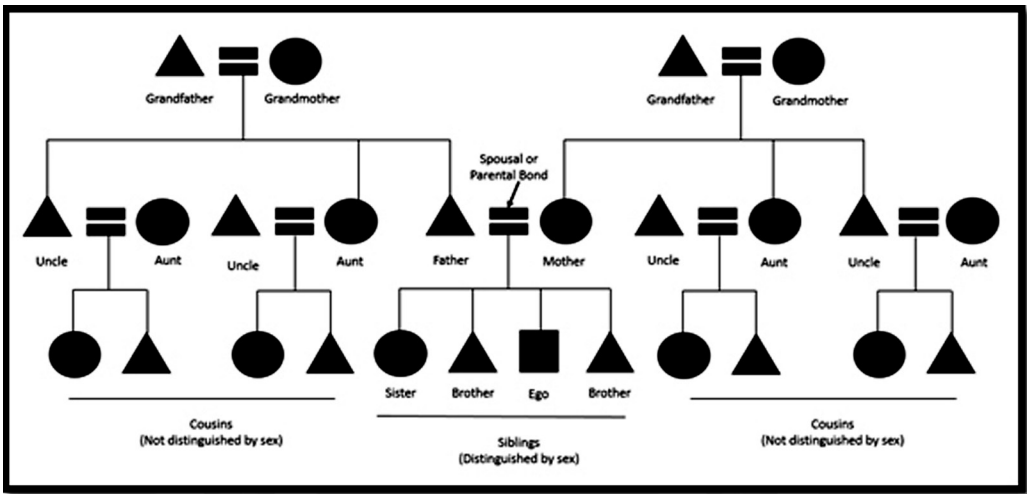

Figure 2: This kinship chart illustrates bilateral descent.

Kinship diagrams use a specific person, who by convention is called Ego, as a starting point. The people shown on the chart are Ego's relatives. In Figure 2, Ego is in the middle of the bottom row. Most kinship diagrams use a triangle to represent males and a circle to represent females. Conventionally, an "equals sign" placed between two individuals indicates a marriage. A single line, or a hyphen, can be used to indicate a recognized union without marriage such as a couple living together or engaged and living together, sometimes with children.

Children are linked to their parents by a vertical line that extends down from the equals sign. A sibling group is represented by a horizontal line that encompasses the group. Usually children are represented from left to right—oldest to youngest. Other conventions for these charts include darkening the symbol or drawing a diagonal line through the symbol to indicate that a person is deceased. A diagonal line may be drawn through the equals sign if a marriage has ended.

Figure 2 shows a diagram of three generations of a typical **bilateral** (two sides) kinship group, focused on parents and children, with aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents and grandchildren. Note that everyone in the diagram is related to everyone else in the diagram, even though they may not interact on a regular basis. The group could potentially be very large, and everyone related through blood, marriage, or adoption is included.

The next two kinship diagram show how the descent group changes in unilineal kinship systems like a patrilineal system (father's line) or a matrilineal system (mother's line). The roles of the family members in relationship to one another are also likely to be different because descent is based on **lineage**: descent from a common ancestor. In a patrilineal system, children are always members of their father's lineage group (Figure 3). In a matrilineal system, children are always members of their mother's lineage group (Figure 4). In both cases, individuals remain a part of their birth lineage throughout their lives, even after marriage. Typically, people must marry someone outside their own lineage. In figures 3 and 4, the shaded symbols represent people who are in the same lineage. The unshaded symbols represent people who have married into the lineage.

In general, **bilateral** kinship is more focused on individuals rather than a single lineage of ancestors as seen in **unlineal** descent. Each person in a bilateral system has a slightly different group of relatives. For example, my brother's relatives through marriage (his in-laws) are included in his kinship group, but are not included in mine. His wife's siblings and children are also included in his group, but not in mine. If we were in a patrilineal or matrilineal system, my brother and I would largely share the same group of relatives.

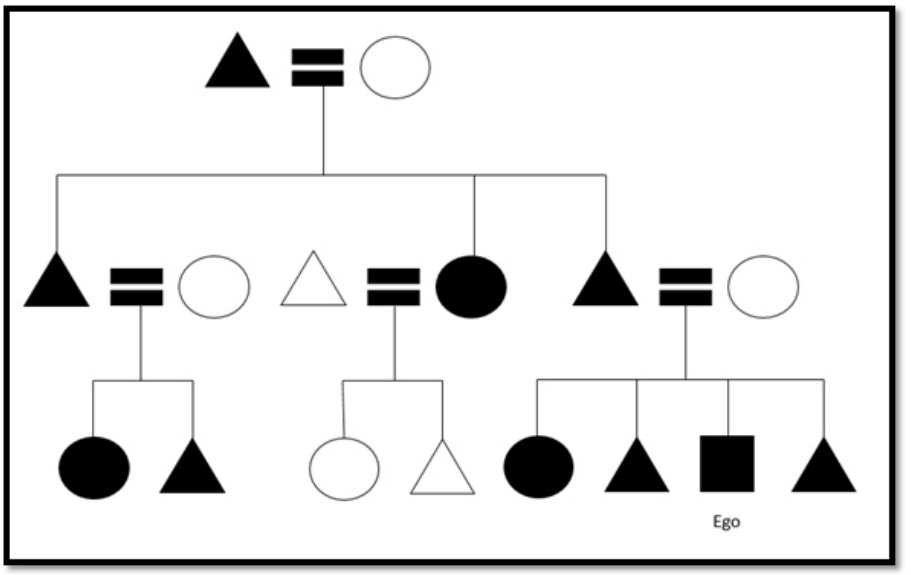

Figure 3: This kinship chart shows a patrilineal household with Ego in father's lineage.

Matrilineages and patrilineages are not just mirror images of each other. They create groups that behave somewhat differently. Contrary to some popular ideas, matrilineages are not **matriarchal**. The terms "matriarchy" and "patriarchy" refer to the power structure in a society. In a patriarchal society, men have more authority and the ability to make more decisions than do women. A father

may have the right to make certain decisions for his wife or wives, and for his children, or any other dependents. In matrilineal societies, men usually still have greater power, but women may be subject more to the power of their brothers or uncles (relatives through their mother's side of the family) rather than their fathers.

Among the matrilineal Hopi, for example, a mothers' brother is more likely to be a figure of authority than a father. The mother's brothers have important roles in the lives of their sisters' children. These roles include ceremonial obligations and the responsibility to teach the skills that are associated with men and men's activities. Men are the keepers of important ritual knowledge so while women are respected, men are still likely to hold more authority.

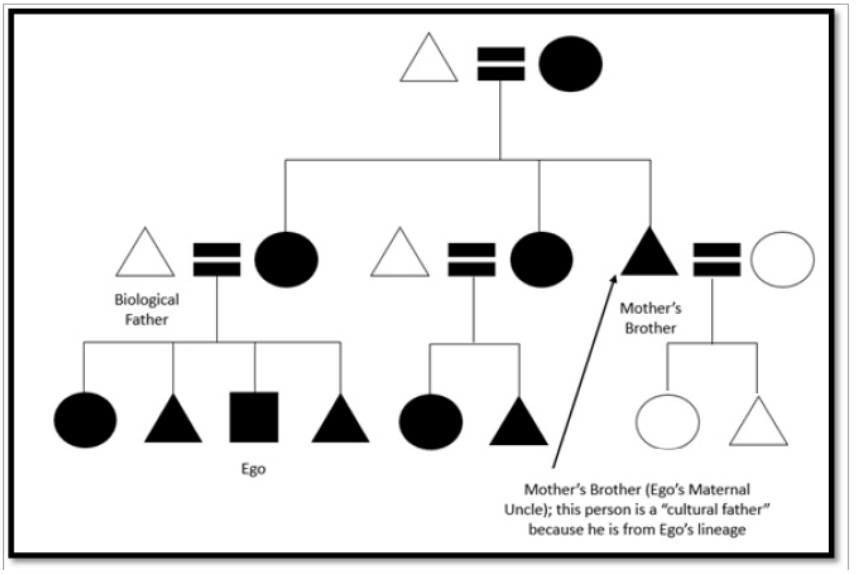

Figure 4: This kinship chart shows a matrilineal household with Ego in mother's lineage.

The Nayar of southern India offer an interesting example of gender roles in a matrilineal society. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, men and women did not live together after marriage because the husbands, who were not part of the matrilineage, were not considered relatives. Women lived for their entire lives in extended family homes with their mothers and siblings. The male siblings in the household had the social role of father and were important father figures in the lives of their sisters' children. The biological fathers of the children had only a limited role in their lives. Instead, these men were busy raising their own sisters' children. Despite the matrilineal focus of the household, Nayar communities were not matriarchies. The position of power in the household was held by an elder male, often the oldest male sibling.

The consequences of this kind of system are intriguing. Men did not have strong ties to their biological offspring. Marriages were fluid and men and women could have more than one spouse, but the children always remained with their mothers.[4] Cross-culturally it does seem to be the case that in matrilineal societies women tend to have more freedom to make decisions about sex and marriage. Children are members of their mother's kinship group, whether the mother is married or not, so there is often less concern about the social legitimacy of children or fatherhood.

Some anthropologists have suggested that marriages are less stable in matrilineal societies than in patrilineal ones, but this varies as well. Among the matrilineal Iroquois, for example, women owned the longhouses. Men moved into their wives' family houses at marriage. If a woman wanted to divorce her husband, she could simply put his belongings outside. In that society, however, men and women also spent significant time apart. Men were hunters and warriors, often away from the home. Women were the farmers and tended to the home. This, as much as matrilineality, could have contributed to less formality or disapproval of divorce. There was no concern about the division of property. The longhouse belonged to the mother's family, and children belonged to their mother's clan. Men would always have a home with their sisters and mother, in their own matrilineal longhouse.[5]

Kinship charts can be useful when doing field research and particularly helpful when documenting changes in families over time. In my own field research, it was easy to document changes that occurred in a relatively short time, likely linked to urbanization, such as changes in family size, in prevalence of divorce, and in increased numbers of unmarried adults. These patterns had emerged in the surveys and interviews I conducted, but they jumped off the pages when I reviewed the kinship charts. Creating kinship charts was a very helpful technique in my field research. I also used them as small gifts for the people who helped with my research and they were very much appreciated.

KINSHIP TERMS

Another way to compare ideas about family across cultures is to categorize them based on **kinship terminology**: the terms used in a language to describe relatives. George Murdock was one of the first anthropologists to undertake this kind of comparison and he suggested that the kinship systems of the world could be placed in six categories based on the kinds of words a society used to describe relatives.[6] In some kinship systems, brothers, sisters, and all first cousins call each other brother and sister. In such a system, not only one's biological father, but all one's father's brothers would be called "father," and all of one's mother's sisters, along with one's biological mother, would be called "mother." Murdock and subsequent anthropologists refer to this as the Hawaiian system because it was found historically in Hawaii. In Hawaiian kinship terminology there are a smaller number of kinship terms and they tend to reflect generation and gender while merging nuclear families into a larger grouping. In other words, you, your brothers and sisters, and cousins would all be called "child" by your parents and your aunts and uncles.

Other systems are more complicated with different terms for father's elder brother, younger brother, grandparents on either side and so on. Each pattern was named for a cultural group in which this pattern was found. The system that most Americans follow is referred to as the Eskimo system, a name that comes from the old way of referring to the Inuit, an indigenous people of the Arctic (Figure 1). Placing cultures into categories based on kinship terminology is no longer a primary focus of anthropological studies of kinship. Differences in kinship terminology do provide insight into differences in the way people think about families and the roles people play within them.

Sometimes the differences in categorizing relatives and in terminology reflect patrilineal and matrilineal systems of descent. For example, in a patrilineal system, your father's brothers are members of your lineage or clan; your mother's brothers do not belong to the same lineage or clan and may or may not be counted as relatives. If they are counted, they likely are called something different from what you would call your father's brother. Similar differences would be present in a matrilineal society.

An Example from Croatia

In many U.S. families, any brother of your mother or father is called "uncle." In other kinship systems, however, some uncles and aunts count as members of the family and others do not. In Croatia, which was historically a patrilineal society, all uncles are recognized by their nephews and nieces regardless of whether they are brothers of the mother or the father. But, the uncle is called by a specific name that depends on which side of the family he is on; different roles are associated with different types of uncles.

A child born into a traditional Croatian family will call his aunts and uncles *stric* and *strina* if they are his father's brothers and their wives. He will call his mother's brothers and their wives *ujak* and *ujna*. The words *tetka* or *tetak* can be used to refer to anyone who is a sister of either of his parents or a husband of any of his parents' sisters. The third category, *tetka* or *tetak*, has no reference to "side" of the family; all are either *tetka* or *tetak*.

These terms are not simply words. They reflect ideas about belonging and include expectations of behavior. Because of the patrilineage, individuals are more likely to live with their father's extended family and more likely to inherit from their father's family, but mothers and children are very close. Fathers are perceived as authority figures and are owed deference and respect. A father's brother is also an authority figure. Mothers, however, are supposed to be nurturing and a mother's brother is regarded as having a mother-like role. This is someone who spoils his sister's children in ways he may not spoil his own. A young person may turn to a maternal uncle, or mother's brother in a difficult situation and expects that a maternal uncle will help him and maintain confidentiality. These concepts are so much a part of the culture that one may refer to a more distant relative or an adult friend as a "mother's brother" if that person plays this kind of nurturing role in one's life. These terms harken back to an earlier agricultural society in which a typical family, household, and economic unit was a joint patrilineal and extended family. Children saw their maternal uncles less frequently, usually only on special occasions. Because brothers are also supposed to be very fond of sisters and protective of them, those additional associations are attached to the roles of maternal uncles. Both father's sisters and mother's sisters move to their own husbands' houses at marriage and are seen even less often. This probably reflects the more generic, blended term for aunts and uncles in both these categories.[7]

Similar differences are found in Croatian names for other relatives. Side of the family is important, at least for close relatives. Married couples have different names for in-laws if the in-law is a husband's parent or a wife's parent. Becoming the mother of a married son is higher in social status than becoming the mother of a married daughter. A man's mother gains authority over a new daughter-in-law, who usually leaves her own family to live with her husband's family and work side by side with her mother-in-law in a house.

An Example from China

In traditional Chinese society, families distinguished terminologically between mother's side and father's side with different names for grandparents as well as aunts, uncles, and in-laws. Siblings used terms that distinguished between siblings by gender, as we do in English with "brother" and "sister," but also had terms to distinguish between older and younger siblings. Intriguingly, however, the Chinese word for "he/she/it" is a single term, *ta* with no reference to gender or age. The traditional Chinese family was an extended patrilineal family, with women moving into the husband's family household. In most regions, typically brothers stayed together in adulthood. Children grew up know-

ing their fathers' families, but not their mothers' families. Some Chinese families still live this way, but urbanization and changes in housing and economic livelihood have made large extended families increasingly less practical.

A Navajo Example

In Navajo (or *Diné*) society, children are "born for" their father's families but "born to" their mother's families, the clan to which they belong primarily. The term **clan** refers to a group of people who have a general notion of common descent that is not attached to a specific ancestor. Some clans trace their common ancestry to a common mythological ancestor. Because clan membership is so important to identity and to social expectations in Navajo culture, when people meet they exchange clan information first to find out how they stand in relationship to each other. People are expected to marry outside the clans of their mothers or fathers. Individuals have responsibilities to both sides of the family, but especially to the matrilineal clan. Clans are so large that people may not know every individual member, and may not even live in the same vicinity as all clan members, but rights and obligations to any clan members remain strong in people's thinking and in practical behavior. I recently had the experience at the community college where I work in Central Arizona of hearing a young Navajo woman introduce herself in a public setting. She began her address in Navajo, and then translated. Her introduction included reference to her clan memberships, and she concluded by saying that these clan ties are part of what makes her a Navajo woman.

An Example from the United States

In many cases, cultures assign "ownership" of a child, or responsibilities for that child anyway, to some person or group other than the mother. In the United States, if one were to question people about who is in their families, they would probably start by naming both their parents, though increasingly single parent families are the norm. Typically, however, children consider themselves equally related to a mother and a father even if one or both are absent from their life. This makes sense because most American families organize themselves according to the principles of bilateral descent, as discussed above, and do not show a preference for one side of their family or the other. So, on further inquiry, we might discover that there are siblings (distinguished with different words by gender, but not birth order), and grandparents on either side of the family who count as family or extended family. Aunts, uncles, and cousins, along with in-laws, round out the typical list of U.S. family members. It is not uncommon for individuals to know more about one side of the family than the other, but given the nature of bilateral descent the idea that people on each side of the family are equally "related" is generally accepted. The notion of bilateral descent is built into legal understandings of family rights and responsibilities in the United States. In a divorce in most states, for example, parents are likely to share time somewhat equally with a minor child and to have joint decision-making and financial responsibility for that child's needs as part of a parental agreement, unless one parent is unable or unwilling to participate as an equal.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

In a basic biological sense, women give birth and the minimal family unit in most, though not all societies, is mother and child. Cultures elaborate that basic relationship and build on it to create

units that are culturally considered central to social life. Families grow through the birth or adoption of children and through new adult relationships often recognized as marriage. In our own society, it is only culturally acceptable to be married to one spouse at a time though we may practice what is sometimes called **serial monogamy**, or marriage to a succession of spouses one after the other. This is reinforced by religious systems, and more importantly in U.S. society, by law. Plural marriages are not allowed; they are illegal although they do exist because they are encouraged under some religions or ideologies. In the United States, couples are legally allowed to divorce and remarry, but not all religions cultural groups support this practice.

When anthropologists talk of family structures, we distinguish among several standard family types any of which can be the typical or preferred family unit in a culture. First is the **nuclear family**: parents who are in a culturally-recognized relationship, such as marriage, along with their minor or dependent children. This family type is also known as a conjugal family. A non-conjugal nuclear family might be a single parent with dependent children, because of the death of one spouse or divorce or because a marriage never occurred. Next is the **extended family**: a family of at least three-generations sharing a household. A **stem family** is a version of an extended family that includes an older couple and one of their adult children with a spouse (or spouses) and children. In situations where one child in a family is designated to inherit, it is more likely that only the inheriting child will remain with the parents when he or she becomes an adult and marries. While this is often an oldest male, it is sometimes a different child. In Burma or Myanmar for example, the youngest daughter was considered the ideal caretaker of elderly parents, and was generally designated to inherit.[8] The other children will "marry out" or find other means to support themselves.

A **joint family** is a very large extended family that includes multiple generations. Adult children of one gender, often the males, remain in the household with their spouses and children and they have collective rights to family property. Unmarried adult children of both genders may also remain in the family group. For example, a household could include a set of grandparents, all of their adult sons with their wives and children, and unmarried adult daughters. A joint family in rare cases could have dozens of people, such as the traditional *zadruga* of Croatia, discussed in greater detail below.

Polygamous families are based on plural marriages in which there are multiple wives or, in rarer cases, multiple husbands. These families may live in nuclear or extended family households and they may or may not be close to each other spatially (see discussion of households below). The terms step family or blended family are used to describe families that develop when adults who have been widowed or divorced marry again and bring children from previous partnerships together. These families are common in many countries with high divorce rates. A wonderful fictional example was *The Brady Bunch* of 1970s television.

Who Can You Marry?

Cultural expectations define appropriate potential marriage partners. Cultural rules emphasizing the need to marry within a cultural group are known as **endogamy**. People are sometimes expected to marry within religious communities, to marry someone who is ethnically or racially similar or who comes from a similar economic or educational background. These are endogamous marriages: marriages within a group. Cultural expectations for marriage outside a particular group are called **exogamy**. Many cultures require that individuals marry only outside their own kinship groups, for instance. In the United States laws prevent marriage between close relatives such as first cousins. There was a time in the not so distant past, however, when it was culturally preferred for Europeans, and Euro-Americans to marry first cousins. Royalty and

aristocrats were known to betroth their children to relatives, often cousins. Charles Darwin, who was British, married his first cousin Emma. This was often done to keep property and wealth in the family.

In some societies, however, a cousin might be a preferred marriage partner. In some Middle Eastern societies, **patrilateral cousin marriage**—marrying a male or female cousin on your father's side—is preferred. Some cultures prohibit marriage with a cousin who is in your lineage but, prefer that you marry a cousin who is not in your lineage. For example, if you live in a society that traces kinship patrilineally, cousins from your father's brothers or sisters would be forbidden as marriage partners, but cousins from your mother's brothers or sisters might be considered excellent marriage partners.

Arranged marriages were typical in many cultures around the world in the past including in the United States. Marriages are arranged by families for many reasons: because the families have something in common, for financial reasons, to match people with others from the "correct" social, economic or religious group, and for many other reasons. In India today, some people practice a kind of modified arranged marriage practice that allows the potential spouses to meet and spend time together before agreeing to a match. The meeting may take place through a mutual friend, a family member, community matchmaker, or even a Marriage Meet even in which members of the same community (caste) are invited to gather (see Figure 5). Although arranged marriages still exist in urban cities such as Mumbai, love matches are increasingly common. In general, as long as the social requirements are met, love matches may be accepted by the families involved.

Figure 5: This advertisement for "Marriage Meet" in Mumbai, India welcomes "boys" and "girls" from the community to participate in a Marriage Meet, in which young people can mingle with and get to know potential spouses in a fun atmosphere. Photo used with permission of Laura Tubelle de González.

Polygamy refers to any marriage in which there are multiple partners. There are two kinds of polygamy: polygyny and polyandry. **Polygyny** refers to marriages in which there is one husband and multiple wives. In some societies that practice polygyny, the preference is for **sororal polygyny**, or the marriage of one man to several sisters. In such cases, it is sometimes believed that sisters will get along better as co-wives. **Polyandry** describes marriages with one wife and multiple husbands. As with polygyny, **fraternal polyandry** is common and involves the marriage of a woman to a group of brothers.

In some cultures, if a man's wife dies, especially if he has no children, or has young children, it is thought to be best for him to marry one of his deceased wife's sisters. A sister, it is believed, is a reasonable substitution for the lost wife and likely a more loving mother to any children left behind. This practice might also prevent the need to return property exchanged at marriage, such

as **dowry** (payments made to the groom's family before marriage), or **bridewealth** (payments made to the bride's family before marriage). The practice of a man marrying the sister of his deceased wife is called **sororate** marriage. In the case of a husband's death, some societies prefer that a woman marry one of her husband's brothers, and in some cases this might be preferred even if he already has a wife. This practice is called **levirate** marriage. This latter practice is described in the Old Testament.[9]

Family Size

Cultural rules generally define not only who makes up a family but also how many people should be in it. In some cultures, larger families are considered ideal. In others, smaller families are preferred. These ideas are often linked to both practical and ideological considerations. Practical considerations might include the availability of housing, work patterns, childcare, the economic contribution children make to a family, or the cost of raising children. Ideological considerations include religious values related to families. In the 1990s, I carried out field research in Croatia, investigating ideas about families. An overwhelming majority of the people I interviewed believed that the ideal family would include three children. Most of these families commented that in their own living memories people preferred as many children as possible so that there would be assistance for farm work. When I was there, however, large families were no longer regarded as practical. Within the same general region, families in urban settings overwhelmingly said that one child was ideal. A shortage of housing was the single most important factor for limiting family size to one child in cities. In both the rural and urban settings in Croatia, most people were Roman Catholic and may have been ideologically predisposed to larger families, but practical considerations were more important to both groups when it came to matters of family size.

During the same period in the 1990s, it was common for families in the United States to say that the ideal family included two children and preferably one of each gender (anecdotal). This of course varies based on factors which include, but are not limited to the ethnicity and religion of the family. In another example, the People's Republic of China, where I lived and worked, had an official one-child policy.[10] A family that included only one child was not a widespread cultural ideal. Most families wished for more children, but had to settle for less.

Families, Households and Domestic Groups

A **family** can be defined as the smallest group of individuals who see themselves as connected to one another. They are usually part of larger kinship groups, but with whom they may not interact on a daily basis. Families tend to reside together and share economic opportunities and other rights and responsibilities. Family rights and responsibilities are a significant part of understanding families and how they work. In the United States, for example, minor children have a right to be supported materially by their parents or other legal guardians. Parents have a responsibility to support and nurture their children. Spouses have a right to mutual support from each other and property acquired during a marriage is considered "common property" in many U.S. states unless specified otherwise by a pre-nuptial agreement. Some family responsibilities are cultural and not legal. Many such responsibilities are reinforced by religious or other ideological notions.

Family members who reside together are called **households**. A household may include larger kinship groups who think of themselves as separate but related families. Households may also include non-family or kin members, or could even consist exclusively of non-related people who

think of themselves as family. Many studies of families cross-culturally have focused on household groups because it is households that are the location for many of the day-to-day activities of a society. Households are important social units in any community

Sometimes families or households are spread across several residential units but think of themselves as a single group for many purposes. In Croatia, because of urban housing constraints, some extended family households operate across one or more residential spaces. An older couple and their married children might live in apartments near each other and cooperate on childcare and cooking as a single household unit. **Domestic group** is another term that can be used to describe a household. Domestic groups can describe any group of people who reside together and share activities pertaining to domestic life including but not limited to childcare, elder care, cooking and economic support, even if they might not describe themselves as "family."

Households may include nuclear families, extended families, joint extended families, or even combinations of families that share a residence and other property as well as rights and responsibilities. In certain regions of Croatia large agricultural households were incredibly numerous. I carried out research in a region known as Slavonia, which from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries was was near the border of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires. Families in portions of this region were referred to as *zadruzi* (plural) or a *zadruga* (singular). They sometimes numbered up to 100 members, all related through blood and marriage. But these households were much more than a nuclear or even a joint extended family. They were more like small towns with specialists within the household group who did things such as shoe horses or sew. These very large households supported a military culture where men between sixteen and sixty years old had to be ready for military service.[11] A Croatian anthropologist in the 1800s reported that one family was so large that an elderly woman died and this was not noticed for three days! The local government in this case forced the family to divide, separating their property and residing in smaller numbers.[12]

Creating Families: Patterns of Marriage

As described above, families can be created in many different ways. A marriage is a cultural, social, and legal process that brings two or more individuals together to create a new family unit. Most cultures have ideas about how marriages should be arranged (whether by families or by the individuals involved), at what age this should occur, what the married partners should have in common (including economic status, religion, ethnicity and so on), and what cultural, religious and legal processes make a marriage valid. In the United States, strong cultural norms suggest that individuals should marry for love and not for other reasons. It is not unusual, however, for communities to teach children to follow certain group norms in choosing a marriage partner. Some religious communities, for example, will not recognize marriages contracted across religious lines. Some families strongly prefer that their children marry individuals with similar economic, cultural, or ethnic backgrounds. Because families tend to socialize with other families similar to themselves, young people are more likely to meet others similar to themselves.

Marriage Exchanges: Dowry and Bridewealth

In many societies, marriages are affirmed with an exchange of property. This is usually the case in places where families have a hand in arranging a marriage. A property exchange recognizes the

challenges faced by a family that loses a member and by a family that takes on a new member. These practices also reflect different notions about the value of the new family member.

Dowry payments are known from U.S. and Western European history. A **dowry** is a gift given by a bride's family to either the bride or to the groom's family at the time of the marriage. In societies that practice dowry, families often spend many years accumulating the gift. In some villages in the former Yugoslavia, the dowry was meant to provide for a woman if she became a widow. The dowry was her share of her family's property and reflected the tradition that land was usually inherited by a woman's brothers. The dowry might include coins, often woven together in a kind of apron and worn on her wedding day. This form of dowry also represented a statement of wealth, prestige or high status for both families; her family's ability to give this kind of wealth, and the prestige of the family who was acquiring a desirable new bride. Her dowry also could include linens and other useful items to be used during her years as a wife. In more recent times, dowries have become extravagant, including things like refrigerators, cars, and houses.

A dowry can also represent the higher status of the groom's family and its ability to demand a payment for taking on the economic responsibility of a young wife. This was of thinking about dowry is more typical of societies in which women are less valued than men. A good dowry enables a woman's family to marry into a better family. In parts of India, a dowry could sometimes be so large that it would be paid in installments. Bride burnings, killing a bride, could happen if her family did not continue to make the agreed upon payments (though there may be other reasons for this awful crime in individual cases). This of course is illegal, but does sometimes occur.[13]

Historically, dowry was most common in agricultural societies. Land was the most valuable commodity and usually land stayed in the hands of men. Women who did not marry were sometimes seen as a burden on their own families because they were not perceived as making an economic contribution and they represented another mouth to feed. A dowry was important for a woman to take with her into a marriage because the groom's family had the upper economic hand. It helped ease the tension of her arrival in the household, especially if the dowry was substantial.

Bridewealth, by contrast, often represents a higher value placed on women and their ability to work and produce children. Bridewealth is an exchange of valuables given from a man's family to the family of his new wife. Bridewealth is common in pastoralist societies in which people make their living by raising domesticated animals. The Masaai are example of one such group. A cattle-herding culture located in Kenya and Tanzania, the Maasai pay bridewealth based on the desirability of the woman. Culturally defined attributes such as her age, beauty, virginity, and her ability to work contribute to a woman's value. The economic value placed on women does not mean that women in such societies necessarily have much freedom, but it does sometimes give them some leverage in their new domestic situations. In rare cases, there might be simultaneous exchanges of dowry and bridewealth. In such cases, often the bridewealth gift was more of a token than a substantial economic contribution.

Post-Marital Residence

Every culture has ideas about where a newly married couple should live. In the United States and in Western Europe, it is usually expected that a new couple create a new domestic unit or household. Ideally they should live together in a place separate from either of their **families of orientation**: the families in which they were raised. They are expected to create a new **family of procreation**: a new household for raising children. The goal of most couples is to eventually live separately from their

original families so that they can focus on their new relationship and be independent. This kind of residence after marriage is called **neolocal residence** (new location). Increasingly, many couples establish a residence together before marriage or may skip the formal marriage altogether.

Another common pattern around the world is **patrilocal residence** (father's location). This means that a couple generally resides with the husband's father's family after marriage. This is a multi-generational practice. The new husband's own mother likely moved into the household when she married his father. Patrilocal residence is common around the world. It creates larger households that can be useful in farming economies. Today, with increasing urbanization and with the very different kinds of jobs associated with industrial capitalism, patrilocal residence has become less common.

A less common pattern worldwide is matrilocal residence. In matrilocal residence societies, men leave their matrilineal families at marriage and move in with their wives' mothers' families. Quite a few Native American groups practiced matrilocal residence, including the Hopi and the Navajo (or *Diné*) in the Southwest, and the Haudenosaunee (or Iroquois) tribes in the Great Lakes region. A very interesting residence pattern found within matrilineal societies is **avunculocal residence** (uncle's location). It means that a couple will live with the wife's mother's brother. In matrilineal societies, in which important property, knowledge, or social position are linked with men, the preference is to keep wealth within the matrilineal household. Property and other cultural items are passed not from biological fathers to sons, but from maternal uncles to nephews. In doing so, property is kept within the matriline (see Figure 3).

An excellent example of avunculocal residence is found in the Trobriand Islands in Papua New Guinea. In families where there was position of authority or significant wealth it was common for a young man to go live with or near his mother's brother at the time of his marriage. Trobriand Islanders passed important magical knowledge and political positions through the mother's lineage. The son of a chief would not become a chief. Instead, the chief's maternal nephew would inherit the position. Trobriand kinship and family life is rich and complicated. Anthropologist Annette Weiner describes men and women as carrying out complementary roles and both men and women are valued culturally. This is not a matriarchy, nor is it a true patriarchy.

The avunculocal arrangement is so important that a man or woman without a cross-gender sibling will adopt one. A woman must have a brother to plant yam gardens for her husband when she marries. A man must have a sister to participate in exchanges of women's wealth on his behalf to enhance his position, and also to ensure that his soul is eventually reborn, after death, into the matrilineage. Family life and the passing of knowledge was changing rapidly in the Trobriand Islands at the end of Weiner's work; more people were converting to Christianity, and while belief in magic was not yet disappearing, Christians could not inherit their uncles' magic. This is an example of a culture in transition. At the same time, however, Trobriand Islanders valued their traditions, culture, and language, and were loathe to lose them altogether.[14]

Patrilocal residence is usually associated with patrilineal descent. Property, knowledge, and positions are inherited through the father's family or the husband's father's family. In the case of patrilocal residence, it was sometimes difficult for a woman to return to her original family if her marriage ended due to death or divorce. The latter was often considered socially shaming and in patrilineal societies women were often blamed for ending the marriage regardless of the actual circumstances. **Matrilocal residence** is usually associated with matrilineal descent. Property, knowledge, and positions are inherited through the mother's family, or the wife's mother's family. Matrilineal and matrilocal societies tended to be less concerned with divorce. Men always had a home with their mothers, aunts, and sisters and might even come and go during a marriage, carrying out responsibilities to

their maternal relatives and staying with them from time to time. Explaining the differences between patrilocal and matrilocal residences risks stereotyping. That said, it is likely that those cultures in which women marry "out" are less likely to value women while those in which men leave their families at marriage are more inclusive of women. This may have something to do with economics and ideologies, but must be examined in each cultural context.

Bilocal residence (two locations) or ambilocal residence (either location) represent two additional and related residential patterns. They are essentially the same and mean that a couple may live with or near either the husband's or wife's family after marriage. A striking example comes from the island of Dobu, a place that is not far from the Trobriand Islands in Papua New Guinea. In Dobu society, which was traditionally matrilineal and practiced village exogamy, a married couple would alternate years living in the husband's village and in the wife's village.[15] In cases of bilocal or ambilocal residence while a couple has the choice to live with either the husband's or wife's family, a choice is made based on which location is best able to accommodate new members or which location needs the additional labor that comes from new members. Once the choice of residence is made, the married couple usually remains in one place.

Inheritance

The inheritance of family property is often a part of cultural values and roles for families. In 1991, when Croatia was on the verge of war, I remember a woman speaking about her house going to her eldest son. Her young daughter was sitting with us at the time, and said to her mother in surprise, "Mama, why not me?" Her mother stroked her head and smiled at her, but was firm when she said "Because you are female." It is typical worldwide, particularly in agricultural societies, for men to inherit family property. The best-known pattern is inheritance by the oldest male. Joint inheritance by brothers, with the oldest brother nominally in charge of the family, is also fairly widespread in joint and extended families. As mentioned above, however, other patterns are found, including property that passes from maternal uncle to maternal nephew in the Trobriand Islands, and inheritance of the family house and corresponding responsibility to care for the older generation by the youngest daughter in Burmese families. This is a further reminder that family organization and expectations are linked to economic systems and to the resources available to the family. Pattern of family life and marriage do not exist apart from the physical and economic environment, and other cultural practices.

Same-Sex Marriage

In the United States, Canada as well as other countries, two individuals of the same sex may be legally married, but in these countries as well as other places, same-sex couples have been creating households and families for centuries, long before legal recognition. Same-sex marriages are documented, for instance, in the history of Native American groups from the Great Plains. On the Plains, men who preferred to dress and take on the roles of women were allowed to marry other men. It was assumed that if one partner gathered plant food and prepared food, the other partner should have a complementary role like hunting. Androgynous individuals, males who preferred female roles or dress, and females who took on male roles, were not condemned but regarded as "two-spirits," a label that had positive connotations.

Two-spirits were considered to embody a third gender combining elements of both male and female. The key to the two-spirit gender identity was behavior: what individuals did in their communities.[16] If a person who was born with a male biological sex felt his identity and chosen lifestyle best matched the social role recognized as female, he could move into a third gender two-spirit category. Today, Native American groups set their own laws regarding same-sex marriage. Many recognize two-spirit individuals, and accept marriage of a two-spirit person to a person of the same biological sex. Although some nations still do not permit same-sex marriage between tribal members, one of the largest tribal nations, the Cherokee legalized same-sex marriages in 2016.

Adoption

Adoption is another way that people form family ties. In the United States, usually it is infants or minor children who are adopted by a non-parental family member like a grandparent, an aunt or uncle, or an older sibling, or by a non-family member. This is usually done when a biological parent is unable or unwilling to raise a child. The decision to give up a child through adoption is a complicated one, and one that parents do not make easily.

In other societies, adoption is viewed differently. In some Pacific Island societies, children who are adopted are considered fortunate because they have two sets of parents; children are not given for adoption because a parent is unwilling or unable to care for them, but rather to honor the adoptive parents. Martha Ward described a young woman in Pohnpei, Micronesia, who had a child for her grandmother, to keep her company in her older years. In another case she described a child who went to dinner at a relative's house and stayed for a number of years in a kind of adoptive situation. In such cases, children retain relationships with biological and adoptive family members, and may even move fluidly between them.[17]

One of the more unusual forms of adoption is adopted-daughter marriage, or *sim pua* marriage. It is found in Taiwan and described by anthropologist Margery Wolf. Wolf worked in Taiwan in the mid-1900s. At that time, Taiwanese families strongly preferred sons over daughters. Sons stayed with their families in adulthood, produced the next generation, cared for parents in old age, and carried on the tradition of ancestor veneration so that one would not become a "wandering ghost" after death. Daughters were regarded as expensive. People believed that they raised daughters for someone else. Dowries and weddings for grown daughters were expensive. Families worried that they would not be able to find suitable husbands for their grown daughters, who would remain a burden on their natal families in their later years, not producers of children or contributors in any other way.[18]

As a result a custom developed of giving up daughters to other families as future daughters-in-law. Mothers would give up their own daughters as infants, only to take in very quickly an adopted daughter from someone else. Sometimes the future wife was adopted before the family had a son. It was said that an adopted daughter/daughter-in-law would "lead in a son." Adopted daughters were reportedly not treated well. They had to do housework, help with childcare, and were not given any privileges such as education. They were often older than their eventual husbands, and had a lower status in the family than their adoptive brothers. There were reports of an adopted daughter being treated badly by adopted siblings, and then being expected to later marry one of them. Wolf reports a very low birth rate among couples who were raised as siblings. Pressure to engage in these kinds of adoptions usually came from a mother-in-law, or the

husband's mother, or a grandmother of the infant girl who had decision-making power in the family because she was the mother of an adult son. Grandmothers saw this kind of arrangement as advantageous to the family, according to Wolf, because birth mothers were more likely to beunhappy about losing a baby daughter, and because caring for another child brought in a future daughter-in-law.[19]

FAMILIES AND CULTURE CHANGE

Families are adaptive groups that help address common societal concerns related to child-rearing, sexual relationships between adults, and gender roles within the household. While there are norms and ideals, expectations and understandings regarding families in all cultures, there are also always situations that represent variations on that norm. Sometimes these are areas where we begin to see culture change. In the United States in the 1960s, young people began to live together openly outside of marriage as couples. Those relationships were often socially disapproved, but today it is much more socially acceptable and common for people to live together prior to marriage or even instead of marriage. Often the couple will also have children before they decide to marry. An ideological variation that began nearly sixty years ago has led to a widespread culture change in attitudes toward marriage.

In the Croatian Republic of Yugoslavia in the 1980s, shortly after the death of long-time leader Josip Broz "Tito," it was still expected that a young couple would live with a husband's family at marriage. At that time, I was engaged in fieldwork that focused on social change. The socialist government had implemented legislation and social programs to support women moving out of traditional roles, becoming educated and productive members of the workforce, and participating in the professional class. There was state-funded daycare and liberal legislation regarding birth control and abortion among other efforts to improve or change the traditional roles of women.

In reality, however, marriage and parenthood were still highly valued. Couples often married at a young age and women tended to still be responsible for all housework. Women themselves valued keeping a clean house, cooking homemade food from scratch without using prepared foods, and caring for their families. Most young wives and mothers lived with their husbands' families. Traditionally, mothers of sons gained power and respect in the family from their married son and daughter-in-law. In the past this relationship was sometimes described as a difficult one, with a daughter-in-law having little say in family and household life. Some of that seemed to persist in the 1980s. Women living with mothers-in-law did not have a great deal of freedom of choice and had to prove themselves at home, leaving less time to think about progressing in education or work.[20]

In an urban environment, however, housing was in short supply. If a family had two sons and one was already married and still living with his natal family, the second son might live with the wife's family at marriage if that family had the space. In these situations, which were not considered ideal but still were in the range of acceptable alternatives, young married women found themselves living with their own mothers rather than a mother-in-law. A mother tended to make life easier for her own daughter rather than insisting that she do quite so much household work. Mothers and daughters were more often easy partners in a household. The mother-in-law of a young man tended not to make his life difficult, but rather to regard him fondly. Women who lived with their own families after marriage were more likely to be able to continue their education, take promotions at work, make more of the opportunities that were provided under socialism.

In Croatia, government engineered policies alone did not produce changes in family patterns or gender roles. It was a variety of factors, including economic pressures and housing shortages, which combined to create an environment in which families changed. It became increasingly common for couples to live with the wife's family and eventually to live on their own. Today in Croatia, women have a great deal of freedom of choice, are likely to live alone with their husbands or, like in the United States, Canada, and European countries, to live with a partner outside of marriage. Change occurs in family life when social and cultural conditions also change.

CONCLUSION

The institutions of the family and marriage are found in all societies and are part of cultural understandings of the way the world should work. In all cultures there are variations that are acceptable as well as situations in which people cannot quite meet the ideal. How people construct families varies greatly from one society to another, but there are patterns across cultures that are linked to economics, religion, and other cultural and environmental factors. The study of families and marriage is an important part of anthropology because family and household groups play a central role in defining relationships between people and making society function. While there is nothing in biology that dictates that a family group be organized in a particular way, our cultural expectations leads to ideas about families that seem "natural" to us. As cultures change over time, ideas about family also adapt to new circumstances.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important for anthropologists to understand the kinship, descent, and family relationships that exist in the cultures they study? In what ways can family relationships structure the lives of individuals?

2. Status and role define the position of people within the family as well as the behaviors they are expected to perform. What are some of the statuses and roles found in families in your community? How have these changed over time?

3. In this chapter, Gilliland describes several different patterns of family organization including nuclear families, extended families, and joint families. While small nuclear families are common in the United States, larger families are common in many other societies. What do you think are some of the practical effects of both small and large families on everyday life?

GLOSSARY

Avunculocal: married individuals live with or near an uncle.

Bilateral descent: descent is recognized through both the father and the mother's sides of the family.

Bridewealth: payments made to the bride's family by the groom's family before marriage.

Clan: a group of people who have a general notion of common descent that is not attached to a specific biological ancestor.

Descent groups: relationships that provide members with a sense of identity and social support based on ties of shared ancestry.

Domestic group: a term that can be used to describe a group of people who live together even if members do not consider themselves to be family.

Dowry: payments made to the groom's family by the bride's family before marriage.

Endogamy: a term describing expectations that individuals must marry within a particular group.

Exogamy: a term describing expectations that individuals must marry outside a particular group.

Extended family: a family of at least three-generations sharing a household.

Family: the smallest group of individuals who see themselves as connected to one another. Family of orientation: the family in which an individual is raised.

Family of procreation: a new household formed for the purpose of conceiving and raising children.

Household: family members who reside together.

Joint family: a very large extended family that includes multiple generations.

Kinship: term used to describe culturally recognized ties between members of a family, the social statuses used to define family members, and the expected behaviors associated with these statuses.

Kinship diagrams: charts used by anthropologists to visually represent relationships between members of a kinship group.

Kinship system: the pattern of culturally recognized relationships between family members.

Kinship terminology: the terms used in a language to describe relatives.

Levirate: the practice of a woman marrying one of her deceased husband's brothers.

Lineage: term used to describe any form of descent from a common ancestor.

Matriarchal: a society in which women have authority to make decisions.

Matrilineal descent: a kinship group created through the maternal line (mothers and their children).

Matrilocal residence: married individuals live with or near the wife's mother's family.

Neolocal residence: newly married individuals establish a household separate from other family members.

Nuclear family: a parent or parents who are in a culturally-recognized relationship, such as marriage, along with minor or dependent children.

Patrilateral cousin marriage: the practice of marrying a male or female cousin on the father's side of the family.

Patrilineal descent: a kinship group created through the paternal line (fathers and their children).

Patrilocal residence: married individuals live with or near the husband's father's family.

Polygamous: families based on plural marriages in which there are multiple wives or, in rarer cases, multiple husbands.

Polyandry: marriages with one wife and multiple husbands.

Polygyny: marriages in which there is one husband and multiple wives.

Role: the set of behaviors expected of an individual who occupies a particular status.

Serial monogamy: marriage to a succession of spouses one after the other.

Sororate marriage: the practice of a man marrying the sister of his deceased wife.

Status: any culturally-designated position a person occupies in a particular setting.

Stem family: a version of an extended family that includes an older couple and one of their adult children with a spouse (or spouses) and children.

Unilineal: descent is recognized through only one line or side of the family.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mary K. Gilliland, Ph.D. (also published as Mary K. Gilliland Olsen) earned a B.A. from Bryn Mawr College, with Honors in Anthropology; and M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in anthropology from the University of California, San Diego. Her primary research took place in the former Yugoslavia (1982–4, 1990–1), Croatia (1993, 1995, 1996–7) and with displaced Bosnians, Croats and Serbs in the United States (2001–3). In Croatia, Mary Kay was affiliated with the *Filozofski Fakultet* in Zagreb, the Ethnographic Museum in Slavonski Brod (Croatia/ Yugoslavia), and with the Institute for Anthropological Research (Zagreb, Croatia both pre- and post-independence).

She has a continuing affiliation as a member of the editorial board for the C*ollegium Antropologicum: The Journal of the Institute for Anthropological Research*, and was named a Lifetime Member of the Croatian Anthropological Society. Mary Kay has also collaborated in projects in Asia, including People's Republic of China (primarily Xinjiang, Western China), Mongolia and Vietnam. Her areas of research interest and publication include culture and social change, gender and ethnic identity, family, marriage and intergenerational relationships. Primarily a "teaching anthropologist," Mary Kay was full-time faculty and Department Chair at Pima Community College in Tucson, Arizona from 1989–2006. She maintains an ongoing relationship as Associate Adjunct Professor of Anthropology at the University of Arizona. She has taught at San Diego Mesa College, University of California, San Diego and the University of Zagreb. Since 2006 she has held a variety of administrative positions including Academic Dean, Vice President of Instruction and is currently Vice President of Academic Affairs at Central Arizona College.

NOTES

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