Kinship, Marriage and Family

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Introduction

This paper focuses mainly on marriage, family and kinship. Anthropologists traditionally have a strong interest in families, along with larger systems of kinship and marriage. These terms are core in anthropology discipline. They are socially constructed and have different meanings across culture. All these three concepts are discussed in this paper accordingly with necessary examples.

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Kinship

Studies of kinship and households have long been a hallmark of sociocultural anthropology. When people form an organized, cooperative group based on their kinship relationships, anthropologists call it a kin group (Peoples and Bailey, 2012:165).

Kinship is considered the lifeblood or the social building blocks of the people anthropologists study. In non-industrialized, non-literate cultures, kinship, marriage and the family form the bases of social life, economic activity and political organization. The behavior and activities of people in such societies are usually kinship oriented (Keesing, 1981).

Anthropologists distinguish between two kinds of relatives. Consanguines are “blood” relatives—people related by birth. Affines are “in-laws”—people related by marriage. Among your consanguineous relatives are your parents, siblings, grandparents, parents’ siblings, and cousins. Your affines include your sister’s husband, wife’s mother, and father’s sister’s husband. In many societies, people incorporate unrelated people into their family and household, acting and feeling toward them in the same way as they do consanguineous relatives. This practice is widespread enough that there is a phrase for it: fictive kinship, in which individuals who are not actually biological relatives act toward one another as if they were kin. Adoption is the most familiar example (Peoples and Bailey, 2012:165).

Key terms:

- Kinship: A network of relatives within which individuals possess certain mutual rights and obligations.
- Consanguines: “Blood” relatives, or people related by birth.
- Affines: In-laws, or people related by marriage.
- Fictive kinship: Condition in which people who are not biologically related behave as if they are relatives of a certain type.

How kinship can be create?

Kinship can be created through three ways:

1. Through Blood: this is the principle of consanguinity. A consanguine is a person who is related to another person through blood. Consanguines include kin, not friends. Examples of consanguines are the following: a parent’s (father/mother/grand-parent) relation to a child; relation between siblings (brothers and sisters); an individual’s relation to his/ her uncle, aunt, niece or nephew; etc. (Zerihun, 2005:117).

2. Through Marriage: this is the principle of affinity. E.g. kinship ties between husband and wife; husband and his wife’s group; wife and her husband’s group, etc. (Zerihun, 2005:117).

3. Through Adoption (fictive), fostering, godparenthood, etc. This is called the principle of fictitious kinship. Fictitious kinship is, in other words, a kind of relationship in which two individuals create a kind of parent-child relationship without any blood or marriage ties (Zerihun, 2005:117).

Why do Anthropologists study Kinship?

Anthropologists study kinship because it is the relationship between people through marriage, family, or other cultural arrangements. Through kinship there is a transmission of goods, ideas and behavior. Kinship is defined as a sense of
being related to a person or people through descent, sharing or marriage. This provides the base for an examination of different styles of partnership, community and reproduction across the globe. Anthropologists study kinship relationships along with the family to fully comprehend how individual thought and behavior are influenced by these interacting aspects of human communities (Scupin and DeCorse, 2011:307).

In Western society and that of developed nations, kinship relationships certainly are important in individuals’ lives. But, compared to many other peoples that anthropologists work among, kinship is not an important organizing principle of society as a whole. Instead, different kinds of specialized groups organize different kinds of activities (Peoples and Bailey, 2012: 192).

**Family of Orientation and Family of Procreation**

- **Family of Orientation:** Nuclear family in which one is born and grows up.
- **Family of Procreation:** Nuclear family established when one marries and has children.

Anthropologists distinguish family between the family of orientation (the family in which one is born and grows up). This family exists to develop, nurture and socialize the children into contributing members of society. The family of procreation (formed when one marries and has children) (Kottak, 2009:141).

**My family types using kinship diagram**

![My family diagram](image)

**Descriptive and Classificatory Kinship**

The kinship is classified in to two types depending on the range of application of the term. These are descriptive and classificatory kinship.

**2.1. Descriptive kinship**

The kinship term which applies to only one particular kin category is known as descriptive kinship. For example, the term ‘father’ and ‘mother’ are applied to our parents only and to no one else.

**2.2. Classificatory Kinship**

The kinship term which applies to persons of two or more kinship categories, is known as classificatory kinship. For example, the term “cousin” is used for referring to father’s
brother’s son, father’s sister’s son, mother’s brother’s son as well as to mother’s sister’s son. Similarly, the term ‘uncle’ refers to mother’s brother, father’s brother, mother’s sister’s husband and father’s sister’s husband.

Kinds of Kinship systems across the world

Every society has a coherent system of labeling various types of kin. However, cultural anthropologists have identified six basic classification systems. These are Eskimo, Hawaiian, Iroquois, Omaha, Crow and Sudanese kinship systems.

Let me see all of them as follows;

1. Sudanese Kinship System

Sudanese kinship system (also known as descriptive system) is found among the peoples of southern Sudan in Africa. Hence, the name Sudanese. In this system, the mother’s brother is distinguished from the father’s brother, who is distinguished from the father; the mother’s sister is distinguished from the mother, as well as from the father’s sister. Each cousin is distinguished from all others, as well as from siblings. It is therefore more precise than any of the other systems (Haviland, 1999:311).
2. Eskimo Kinship System

Found in approximately 1/10 of the world’s societies, the Eskimo kinship system is associated with bilateral descent. The major feature of this system is that it emphasizes the nuclear family by using separate terms (such as mother, father, sister, brother) that are not used outside the nuclear family. Beyond the nuclear family, many other relatives (such as aunts, uncles and cousins) are lumped together. This emphasis on the nuclear family is related to the fact that societies using the Eskimo system lack large descent groups such as lineages and clans. Moreover, the Eskimo system is most likely to be found in societies (such as the US and certain food collecting societies) in which economic conditions favor an independent nuclear family (Ferraro, 2008:249).

3. Hawaiian Kinship System

Found in approximately one third of world’s societies, the Hawaiian system uses a single term for all relatives of the same sex and generation. To illustrate a person’s father, father’s brother and mother’s brother are all referred to by the single term father. In EGO’s own generation, the only distinction is based on sex, so that male cousins are equated with brothers and female cousins are equated with sisters. The Hawaiian system, which uses the least number of terms, is often associated with ambilineal descent, which permits a person to affiliate with either the mother’s or father’s kin. The Hawaiian system is found in societies that submerge the nuclear family into a larger kin group to the extent that nuclear family members are roughly equivalent in importance to more distant kin (Ferraro, 2010:246).

4. Iroquois Kinship System

In Iroquois system EGO’s father and father’s brother are called by the same term, and EGO’s mother’s brother is called by a different term. Likewise EGO’s mother and mother’s sister are lumped together under one term, and a different term is used for EGO’s father’s sister. Thus a basic
distinction of classification is made between the sex of one’s parent’s siblings (that is mother’s brothers and sisters and father’s brothers and sisters). Within EGO’s own generation, EGO’s own siblings are given the same term as the parallel cousins (children of one’s mother’s sister or father’s brother), and different terms are used for cross cousins (children of one’s mother’s brother or father’s sister). Thus terminological distinction made between cross and parallel cousins are logical, given the distinction made between the siblings of EGO’s parents. The Iroquois system emphasizes the importance of unilineal descent groups by distinguishing between members of one’s own lineage and members of other lineages (Ferraro, 2008:249-50).

5. Omaha Kinship System
The Omaha system (named for the Omaha Indians of Nebraska) is the patrilineal equivalent of the matrilineal crow system. Thus, a mother and her sister are designated by a single term, the father and his brother are merged under another, and parallel cousins are merged with brothers and sisters. Cross cousins on the maternal side are raised a generation, while those on the paternal side are equated with ego’s children’s generation. Thus, children born of women from one patrilineage for the men of another patrilineage are lowered by one generation (Haviland, 1999:311).

6. Crow Kinship System
It is a kinship system associated with matrilineal descent, in which similar terms are used for (1) one’s father and father’s brother, (2) one’s mother and mother’s sister and (3) one’s siblings and parallel cousins. It is the mirror image of the Omaha system. The crow and Omaha systems are similar in that both use similar terms of EGO’s father and father’s brother, EGO’s mother and mother’s sister, and EGO’s siblings and parallel cousins. But because of its less
important nature, the father’s side of the family merges generations. That is, all males in the father’s line, regardless of generation, are combined under a single term, as are all women in that line. However, on EGO’s mother’s side of the family, which is the important descent group, generational distinctions are recognized (Ferraro, 2010: 247).

Moiety, Clan and Lineage

Key terms:

**Lineage:** A unilineal descent group larger than an extended family whose members can actually trace how they are related.

**Clan:** A named unilineal descent group, some of whose members are unable to trace how they are related, but who still believe themselves to be kinfolk.

**Moiety:** Group that results from a division of a society into two halves on the basis of descent.

**a. Lineage**

A lineage is a unilineal kinship group descended from a common ancestor or founder who lived four to six generations ago and in which relationships among members can be exactly stated in genealogical terms (Haviland, et al, 2010:504). A lineage uses demonstrated descent. Members can recite the names of their forebears in each generation from the apical ancestor through the present. (This doesn’t mean their recitations are accurate, only those lineage members think they are (Kottak, 2010:454).

The lineage is ancestor oriented; membership in the group is recognized only if relationship to a common ancestor can be traced and proved. The lineage is a strong, effective base of social organization. A common feature of lineages is their exogamy. This means lineage members must find their marriage partners in other lineages (Haviland, 1999:300).

**b. Clan**

The term clan and its close relative, the term *sib*, have been used differently by various anthropologists, and a certain amount of confusion exists about their meaning. The clan (*sib*) will be defined here as a noncorporate descent group whose members assume descent from a common ancestor (who may be real or fictive) but are unable to trace the actual genealogical links back to that ancestor. This stems from the great genealogical depth of the clan, whose founding ancestor lived so far in the past that the links must be assumed rather than known in detail. A clan differs from a lineage in another respect; it lacks the
residential unity; because clan membership is dispersed rather than localized. It tends to be more a unit for ceremonial matters. Only on special occasions will the membership gather for specific purposes. Like lineage they may regulate through exogamy. Members usually are expected to give protection and hospitality to others in the clan (Haviland, 1999:302-3). Hence, these can be expected in any local group that includes people who belong to a single clan.

A clan is an extended unilineal kinship group, often consisting of several lineages, whose members claim common descent from a remote ancestor, usually legendary or mythological (Haviland, et al 2010:504). Unlike lineages, clans use stipulated descent. Clan members merely say they descend from the apical ancestor. They don’t try to trace the actual genealogical links between themselves and that ancestor (Kottak, 2010:454).

c. Moiety

If the entire society is divided into only two major descents groups, whether they are equivalent to clans or phratries or involve an even more all-inclusive level, each group is called a moiety (after the French word for “half”). Moiety members also believe they share a common ancestor but cannot prove it through definite genealogical links.

Marriage

Marriage: A culturally sanctioned union between two or more people that establishes certain rights and obligations between the people, between them and their children, and between them and their in-laws. Such marriage rights and obligations most often include, but are not limited to, sex, labor, property, childrearing, exchange, and status.

Marriage is an institution with significant roles and functions in addition to reproduction. No definition of marriage is broad enough to apply easily to all societies and situations. Marriage is a union between a man and a woman such that the children born to the woman are recognized as legitimate offspring of both partners (Royal Anthropological Institute 1951: 111).

Marriage is a set of cultural rules that bring together a man and a woman (usually) to create the nuclear family and to define their behavior toward each other, their offspring, and their society (Park, 2010:178).

Ferraro (2010) defined marriage as a series of customs formalizing the relationship adult partners with the family. Marriage is a socially approved union between two or more adult partners that regulates the sexual and economic rights and obligation between them. Marriage usually involves an explicit contract or understanding and is entered into with assumption that will be permanent.

Persons with little knowledge of cultural diversity might say that marriage is a relationship between a woman and a man involving romantic love, sexual activity, cohabitation, child rearing, and shared joys and burdens of life. People trained in law might also note that marriage has legal aspects, such as joint property rights and obligations to share support of children. Religious people may want to include their beliefs that marriage is a relationship sanctioned by God, a relationship that should last until the parties are separated by death. However, there is still no agreement on the “best” one. Most anthropologists agree,
however, that marriage in most human societies involves the following:

✓ A culturally defined (variable) relationship between a man and a woman from different families, which regulates sexual intercourse and legitimates children.
✓ A set of rights the couple and their families obtain over each other, including rights over children born to the woman.
✓ An assignment of responsibility for nurturing and enculturating children to the spouses and/or to one or both sets of their relatives.
✓ A creation of variably important bonds and relationships between the families of the couple that have social, economic, political, and sometimes ritual dimensions (Peoples and Bailey, 2012:169).

Marriage and Economic Exchange

In many societies marriage involves a transfer or exchange of property.

**Bride Wealth/price**

Bridewealth is the transfer of symbolic goods from the husband’s family to the bride’s family. This form of economic exchange is most often found in agricultural and pastoral patrilineal societies, though it is not limited to those lifestyles. Usually, bridewealth represents some form of compensation to the bride’s family from the husband’s family, for their loss of her labor and ability to bear them children. This is because when a woman marries, she goes to live, produce children, and work with her husband’s family, leaving her own. In many cases, bridewealth also serves to create a positive relationship between the families of the husband and wife. When the wife's family receives the bridewealth, they use the goods they receive for their daughter to find her brother a wife (Peoples and Bailey, 2012:181).

Bridewealth is the widespread custom that requires a man and/or his relatives to transfer wealth to the relatives of his bride. It is easily the most common of all marital exchanges, found in more than half the world’s cultures. The term bridewealth is well chosen because the goods transferred are usually among the most valuable symbols of wealth in the local culture. In sub-Saharan Africa, cattle and sometimes other livestock are the most common goods used for bridewealth (Kottak, 2009:157).

**Bride Service**

Bride service is the custom in which a husband is required to spend a period of time working for the family of his bride. Bride service is the second most common form of marital exchange; it is the usual compensation given to the family of a bride in roughly one-eighth of the world’s cultures. Sometimes it occurs in addition to other forms of marital exchange,
however, and occasionally it can be used to reduce the amount of bridewealth owed (Peoples and Bailey, 2012:182).

**Dowry**

Dowry is a transfer of wealth, usually flowing from a woman’s parents or family when she is to be married in the form of money, land or other goods. Often, the husband brings various forms of wealth to a newly created household, and a dowry is thought of as the wife’s donation, to the household or the husband. Dowry can also be viewed as inheritance for the woman, though this is usually in cultures where both men and women are heirs (Kottak, 2009:157).

Marital exchange is called dowry when the family of a woman transfers a portion of its own wealth or property to the woman (their daughter) and/or to her husband and his family. The main thing to understand about dowry is that it is not simply the opposite of bride wealth; that is, it is not “groom wealth.” The woman and her family do not acquire marital rights over her husband when they provide dowry, as they would if dowry were the opposite of bridewealth; rather, the bride and her husband receive property when they marry, rather than when the bride’s parents die. By providing dowry, parents give their female children extra years of use of the property and publicly demonstrate their wealth. Sometimes dowry is the share of a woman’s inheritance that she takes into her marriage for the use of her new family. Dowry may represent an occasion for a family to display their wealth publicly by ostentatiously moving furniture and clothing from their house to that of their daughter’s husband. Among other peoples, the family of a man will not allow him to marry a woman unless she and her family are able to make a dowry payment. Typically, the cultural rationale is that women do not contribute as much to a family as do men, so a family must be compensated for admitting a new female member. (Interestingly, this rationale is usually found among societies in which the domestic labor of the female is both difficult and valuable.) (Peoples and Bailey, 2012:182)

**Marriage Types**

**Key terms:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Monogamy</strong></td>
<td>one-to-one marriage, usually male to female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Polygamy</strong></td>
<td>one-to-many marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Polyandry</strong></td>
<td>one woman married to more than one male at a time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fraternal polyandry</strong></td>
<td>two or more brothers taking one woman as their wife simultaneously.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Polygyny</strong></td>
<td>One male marrying more than one wife at a time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Serial Monogamy</strong></td>
<td>One man marries one woman after he divorced his wife.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wife inheritance/ levirate marriage</strong></td>
<td>A man marries his deceased brother’s wife.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sororate marriage</strong></td>
<td>a man marry the sister of his deceased wife.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Monogamy**

Monogamy is a form of marriage in which both partners have just one spouse. It is the most common form of marriage worldwide.
ii. Polygamy

Monogamy is the most common marriage form worldwide, but it is not the most culturally preferred. That distinction goes to polygamy (one individual having multiple spouses) specifically to polygyny, in which a man is married to more than one woman and polyandry, the marriage of one woman to two or more men simultaneously. It is known in only a few societies (Haviland, et al, 2010: 482). In some societies, if a man dies, leaving behind a wife and children, it is customary that one of his brothers marries the widowed sister-in-law—but this obligation does not preclude the brother having another wife then or in the future. This custom, called the levirate (from the Latin ‘levir’, which means “husband’s brother”), not only provides security for the widow (and her children) but also is a way for the husband’s family to maintain the established relationship with her family and their rights over her sexuality and her future children: It acts to preserve kin relationships between families previously established. The levirate also ensures that the deceased man’s lineage will be perpetuated, as all children born to his remarried widow are formally acknowledged as his legitimate offspring, even though his brother is their biological father (Haviland, et al, 2010:483).

A related marriage tradition is the sororate (Latin ‘soror’ means “sister”), in which a man has the right to marry a (usually younger) sister of his deceased wife. In some societies, the sororate also applies to a man who has married a woman who is unable to bear children. This custom entitles a man to a replacement wife from his in-laws. In societies that have the levirate and sororate—customary in many traditional foraging, farming, and herding cultures—the in-law relationship between the two families is maintained even after the spouse’s death and secures an established alliance between two groups (ibid).

There are several other marriage forms, each with its own particular cultural expressions and reasons for being. For instance, the social practice of group marriage occurs in a few societies. Also known as co-marriage, this is a rare arrangement in which several men and women have sexual access to one another (ibd).

Rules of Marriages

Key terms:

| Exogamous rules: Marriage rules prohibiting individuals from marrying a member of their own social group or category. |
| Endogamous rules: Marriage rules requiring individuals to marry some member of their own social group or category. |

Whatever its cause, the utility of the incest taboo can be seen by examining its effects on social structure. Closely related to prohibitions against incest are rules against endogamy, or marriage within a particular group of individuals (cousins and in-laws, for example). If the group is defined as one’s immediate family alone, then societies generally prohibit or at least discourage endogamy and practice or at least encourage exogamy, or marriage outside the group (Haviland, 1999:237).

Exogamy
Everywhere, norms identify members of some social groups or categories as potential spouses and specify members of other groups or categories as not eligible for marriage. One set of rules is exogamous rules. Exogamy (“out-marriage”) means that an individual is prohibited from marrying within her or his own family or other kin group or, less commonly, village or settlement. (Recall that the incest taboo prohibits sex, whereas rules of exogamy forbid intermarriage.) Because the incest taboo applies to those people whom the local culture defines as close relatives, members of one’s own nuclear family and other close kin are almost everywhere prohibited as spouses (Peoples and Bailey, 2012:173).

**Endogamy**

Other kinds of marriage rules are endogamous rules. Endogamy (“in-marriage”) means that an individual must marry someone in his or her own social group. The classic example of an endogamous group is the caste in traditional Hindu India (Peoples and Bailey, 2012:173).

Endogamous rules have the effect of maintaining social barriers between groups of people defined as having different social ranks.

Key terms:

- **Patrilocal residence**: A residence pattern in which a married couple lives in the husband’s father’s place of residence.
- **Matrilocal residence**: A residence pattern in which a married couple lives in the wife’s mother’s place of residence.
- **Ambilocal residence**: A residence pattern in which a married couple may choose either matrilocal or patrilocal residence.
- **Neolocal residence**: A pattern in which a married couple establishes the household in a location apart from either the husband’s or the wife’s relatives.

There are several common patterns of residence that a newly married couple live. As (Haviland, et al, 2010:495-6) elucidate;

1. **Patrilocal residence**: is when a married couple lives in the husband’s father’s place of residence. This arrangement is...
favorable in situations where men play a predominant role in subsistence, particularly if they own property that can be accumulated, if polygyny is customary, if warfare is prominent enough to make cooperation among men especially important, and if an elaborate political organization exists in which men wield authority.

2. **Matrilocal residence**, in which a married couple lives in the wife’s mother’s place of residence, is likely if cultural ecological circumstances make the role of the woman predominant for subsistence. It is found most often in horticultural societies, where political organization is relatively uncentralized and where cooperation among women is important.

3. **Ambilocal residence** (‘ambi’ in Latin means “both”), a pattern in which a married couple may choose either matrilocal or patrilocal residence. Because the couple can join either the bride’s or the groom’s family, family membership is flexible, and the two can live where the resources look best or where their labor is most needed.

4. **Neolocal residence**, a married couple forms a household in a separate location. This occurs where the independence of the nuclear family is emphasized.

**Reasons of Divorce**

In some societies marriages may seem to go on forever, but in our own they are fairly brittle. Ease of divorce varies across cultures. What factors work for and against divorce? As we’ve seen, marriages that are political alliances between groups are more difficult to dissolve than are marriages that are more individual affairs, of concern mainly to the married couple and their children. Substantial bridewealth may decrease the divorce rate for individuals; replacement marriages (levirate and sororate) also work to preserve group alliances. Divorce tends to be more common in matrilineal than in patrilineal societies. When residence is matrilocal (in the wife’s home village), the wife may simply send off a man with whom she’s incompatible (Kottak, 2009:159).

Some anthropologists have argued that the higher the bride wealth payment, the more stable the marriage and less likely a divorce, since it would require the return of bride wealth, which may be difficult in such societies. Others have said that frequency of divorce and stability of marriage are related not to the amount of bride wealth but to the degree of incorporation of a wife into her husband’s family or kin group (Rosman, et al, 2009:105).

**Family**

A family is the basic unit of the social group. Anthropologists are interested in looking at families and how they reckon kin since kin behavior has specific rules in each culture. A family is a group of people (e.g., parents, children, siblings, grandparents, grandchildren, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, cousins, spouses, siblings-in-law, parents-in-law, and children-in-law) who are considered to be related in some way, for example, by “blood” (common ancestry or descent) or marriage. Some families, such as the nuclear family, are residually based; its members live together. Others are not; they live apart but come together for family reunions of various sorts from time to time (Kottak, 2009: 141).

As Ferraro (2010) elucidated, family is a social unit characterized by economic cooperation, the management of reproduction and childrearing and common residence. It includes both male and female adults who maintain socially approved sexual relationships.

**Family Types and Challenges on its Future**
Key terms:

**Nuclear family**: consists of a married couple together with their unmarried children.

**Extended family**: Culturally recognized relatives of varying degrees of distance.

1. **The Nuclear Family**

A nuclear family is impermanent; it lasts only as long as the parents and children remain together. Most people belong to at least two nuclear families at different times in their lives. They are born into a family consisting of their parents and siblings. When they reach adulthood, they may marry and establish a nuclear family that includes the spouse and eventually children (Kottak, 2009: 141).

2. **Extended Family**

When two or more closely related nuclear families cluster together in a large domestic group, they form a unit known as the **extended family**. This larger family unit, common in traditional horticultural, agricultural, and pastoral societies around the world, typically consists of siblings with their spouses and offspring, and often their parents. All of these kin, some related by blood and some by marriage, live and work together for the common good and deal with outsiders as a single unit (Haviland, et al.2010: 493).

**Theoretical Arguments Explaining Incest Taboo**

Anthropologists have wondered a lot about why nuclear family incest is almost universally taboo. This wonder sometimes surprises people who are not anthropologists, who usually think that intercourse within the family is universally prohibited because inbreeding is genetically harmful to the children (Peoples and Bailey, 2012:167).

A taboo (from the Polynesian tabu) is a negative rule; it tells you not to do something. The incest taboo is a rule that says one cannot have sex with or marry persons to whom one is too closely related. Every society does include under the incest taboo the prohibition against sex and marriage within the nuclear family between siblings and between parents and offspring. That part is the cultural universal (Park, 2010:178).

A cultural rule that long has fascinated anthropologists as well as other student of human behavior is the **incest taboo**. This prohibits sexual relations at least between parents and children of opposite sex and usually siblings as well. Once thought to be universal, save for a few exceptions involving siblings, the taboo has become something of a challenge for anthropologists to explain, both regarding this supposed universality and why incest commonly should be regarded as such loathsome behavior. The incest taboo ensures that children and their parents, who are constantly in intimate contact, avoid regarding
one another as sexual objects (Haviland, 1999:235).

The prohibition of incest, which is universal and requires the avoidance of union between close relations, has as its positive counterpart the institution of exogamy, the obligation to choose a marriage partner outside the close family group. The prohibition of incest leads to exogamy, which implies marriage with others (Barnard and Spencer, 1996:528). There are some theories to elucidate incest taboo.

1. **Natural Aversion Theory**

It was popular about a hundred years ago, rests on the somewhat unsatisfying concept that there is a natural aversion to sexual intercourse among those who have grown up together. Although anthropologists now recognize no natural (genetically produced) aversion to having sexual relations within the nuclear family. According to this theory, people who have grown up together have little sexual interest in each other. Nevertheless this familiarity theory does not appear to be a particularly convincing explanation for the existence of the incest taboo. The natural aversion theory does not explain why we need a strongly sanctioned incest taboo if people already have a natural aversion to incest (Ferraro, 2008:210).

2. **Inbreeding Theory**

A popular theory that attempts to explain the existence of the incest taboo focuses on the potentially harmful effects of inbreeding on the family. This inbreeding theory, proposed well before the introduction of the science of genetics, holds that mating between close kin, who are likely to carry the same harmful recessive genes, tends to produce a higher incidence of genetic defects (which result in an increased susceptibility to disease and higher mortality rates). There is, however, little solid genetic evidence to support this view. What we do know is that out breeding, which occurs in human populations with strong incest taboos, has positive genetic consequences. According to Bernard Campbell (1979) cited in (Ferraro, 2008), the benefits outbreeding include increases in genetic variation, a reduction in lethal recessive traits, improved health and lower rates of mortality. This inbreeding theory has, no doubt, led to numerous state laws prohibiting cousin marriage in the United States. It should be noted, however, that there is hardly consensus on this issue among state legislatures because thirty states have laws against cousin marriage whereas twenty do not. Moreover, no European nations prohibit cousin marriage (Ferraro, 2008:211).

3. **Family Disruption Theory**

Whereas the inbreeding theory focuses on the biological consequences of incest, a third theory centers on its negative social consequences. This theory which is most closely linked with Bronislaw Malinowski (1927) holds that mating between a mother and son, father and daughter, or brother and sister would create such intense jealousies within the nuclear family that the family would not be able to function as a unit of economic cooperation and socialization. For example, if adolescents were permitted to satisfy their sexual urges within the nuclear family unit, fathers and sons and mothers and daughters would be competing with one another, and consequently normal family role relationships would be seriously disrupted. The incest taboo according to this theory, originated as a mechanism to repress the desire to satisfy one’s sexual urges within the nuclear family (Ferraro, 2008:212).

In addition to causing disruption among nuclear family members through sexual competition, incest creates the further problem of role ambiguity. For example, if a child is born from the union of a mother and her son, the child’s
father will also be the child’s half-brother, the child’s mother will also be the child’s grandmother, and the child’s half-sister will also be the child’s aunt. These are just some of the bizarre role combinations created by such an incestuous union. Because different family roles, such as brother and father, carry with them vastly different rights and obligations, and behavioral expectations, the child will have great difficulty deciding how to behave toward immediate family members. Thus, the incest taboo can be viewed as a mechanism that prevents this type of role ambiguity or confusion (ibid).

4. Theory of Expanding Social Alliances
Incest avoidance can also be explained in terms of positive social advantage for societies that practice it. By forcing people to marry out of their immediate family, the incest taboo functions to create a wider network of interfamily alliances, thereby enhancing cooperation, social cohesion and survival. Each time one of your close relatives mates with a person from another family, it creates a new set of relationships with people toward whom your family is less likely to be hostile. This theory first set forth by Edward Tylor (1889) and later developed by Claude Levi-Strauss (1969) holds that it makes little sense to mate with someone from one’s own group with whom one already has good relations. Instead there is more to be gained both biologically and socially, by expanding one’s networks outward (Ferraro, 2008:212).

Not only does mating outside one’s own group create a more peaceful society by increasing one’s allies, but it also creates a larger gene pool, which has a greater survival advantage than a smaller gene pool (ibid).

Conclusion
Anthropologists study kinship because it is the relationship between people through marriage, family, or other cultural arrangements. The three types of kinship which exist are consanguinial (related by blood), affinal (related by law/marriage) and fictive kinship. Through kinship there is a transmission of goods, ideas and behavior. Kinship is defined as a sense of being related to a person or people through descent, sharing or marriage. This provides the base for an examination of different styles of partnership, community and reproduction across the globe.

Marriage, family, and kinship systems are institutionalized social arrangements in all known societies. However, the nature of the arrangement differs greatly across societies, over time, and even within a given society at a specific time. Understanding the principles of kinship, marriage, and the family; the diverse forms of family and marriage practices; the values and norms that are associated with them; etc., are very important. Marriage and the family form the foundation of all societies; without sound and proper family and marriage systems, society will collapse.

References


