

## **MARRIAGE and the FAMILY**

**Some basic points about marriage and the family from anthropological research:**

- (1) Marriage exists in all cultures BUT the form marriage takes varies greatly, i.e. who one may appropriately marry, how many spouses one may have, how one marries and what are the functions and expectations of marriage show much variation.**
- (2) Families exist in all cultures BUT the form, size and functions of families vary greatly.**

**Marriage can be defined as a socially sanctioned economic, social and sexual union usually between a woman and a man. Marriage is assumed to be more or less permanent. Marriage also assumes reciprocity (rights and obligations) between spouses and between parents and their children.**

**Why marriage? Some commonly cited reasons:**

- (1) aids gender division of labor**
- (2) supports a prolonged infant dependency**
- (3) decreases sexual competition**
- (4) supplies post-partum feeding**

**How does one marry? The ceremony of marriage takes an endless and changing variety of forms.**

**Who does one marry?**

**Incest taboo are deeply ingrained social rules that prohibit parent-child mating (Fa and Da; Mo and So; Br and Si).**

**Why are incest taboos universal? The following are some possible explanations:**

- (1) childhood familiarity; being reared together in early childhood works against sexual attraction**
- (2) Freud hypothesized that such taboos were a reaction against unconscious, unacceptable desires.**

**(3) family disruption; sexual competition within the family would create such tension and rivalry that the family would become dysfunctional.**

**(4) cooperation; taboos insure that people marry outside their family and form marriage ties with other families to make a larger cooperative community.**

**(5) inbreeding; the closer the degree of inbreeding; the greater the chance for harmful genetic effects. People within the same family are likely to carry the same harmful recessive genes.**

**Arranged marriages those that are orchestrated by family members or go-betweens rather than the individuals who marry.**

**Exogamy dictates that one must marry outside one's kin group or community.**

**Endogamy dictates that one must marry within some group.**

**Cousin marriage dictates which kind of cousin one may or may not marry.**

**Cross-cousins are the children of siblings of the opposite sex (MoBr and FaSi).**

**Parallel cousins are the children of siblings of the same sex (MoSi and FaBr).**

**Levirate is a custom whereby a man is obligated to marry his brother's widow.**

**Sororate is a custom whereby a woman is obligated to marry her sister's widower.**

**How many can one marry?**

**Polygamy is a form of plural spouse marriage. Its forms are:**

**Polygyny is a form of marriage where one man is married to more than one woman at the same time. Often the man is married to sisters, called sororal polygyny.**

**Polyandry is a form of marriage where one woman is married to more than one man at the same time. Often the woman is married to brothers, called fraternal polyandry.**

**Family forms:**

**nuclear family is a single couple family**

**extended family is a multiple generation family**

**Economic aspects of marriage:**

**Bride price or bride wealth is a gift of money or goods from the groom's family to the bride's family.**

**Bride service is a requirement that a groom work for the bride's family for a period of time; sometimes before the marriage, sometimes after.**

**Dowry is a transfer of goods or money from the bride's family to the bride, the groom or the couple.**

**An indirect dowry is the transfer of goods from groom's family to the bride's for redistribution first to her and second to her family.**

**Changes in marriage and the family:**

**Single parent families (especially female headed families, i.e. a matrifocal family) are becoming more common in many cultures; people are becoming parents outside the formal structure of marriage.**

**Same biological sex marriages are becoming more socially sanctioned if still regarded as controversial by some.**