How are biology and culture expressed in human sex/gender systems?

How do gender, gender roles, and gender stratification correlate with other social, economic, and political variables?

What is sexual orientation, and how do sexual practices vary cross-culturally?

Women today work increasingly outside the home in varied positions, including soldier. This photo, taken in Deu, Germany in 2001, shows one of the first women recruited into the German army—along with her male counterparts.
understanding OURSELVES

A table (9.1) in this chapter lists activities that are generally done by the men in a society, generally done by the women in a society, or done by either men or women (swing). In this table, you will see some “male” activities familiar to our own culture, such as hunting, butchering, and building houses, along with activities that we consider typically female, such as doing the laundry and cooking. This list may bring to mind as many exceptions as followers of these “rules.” Although it is not typical, it certainly is not unheard of for an American woman to hunt large game (think of Sarah Palin) or an American man to cook (think of Emeril Lagasse or other male celebrity chefs). Celebrities aside, women in our culture increasingly work outside the home in a wide variety of jobs—doctor, lawyer, accountant, professor—traditionally considered men’s work. It is not true, however, that women have achieved equity in all types of employment. As of this writing, only 17 out of 100 United States senators are women. Only three women have ever served on the United States Supreme Court.

Ideas about proper gender behavior are changing just as inconsistently as are the employment patterns of men and women. Popular shows like Sex and the City feature characters who display nontraditional gender behavior and sexual behavior, while old beliefs, cultural expectations, and gender stereotypes linger. The American expectation that proper female behavior should be polite, restrained, or meek poses a challenge for women, because American culture also values decisiveness and “standing up for your beliefs.” When American men and women display similar behavior—speaking their minds, for example—they are judged differently. A man’s assertive behavior may be admired and rewarded, but similar behavior by a woman may be labeled “aggressive”—or worse.

Both men and women are constrained by their cultural training, stereotypes, and expectations. For example, American culture stigmatizes male crying. It’s okay for little boys to cry, but becoming a man often means giving up this natural expression of joy and sadness. Why shouldn’t “big lugs” cry when they feel emotions? American men are trained as well to make decisions and stick to them. In our stereotypes, changing one’s mind is more associated with women than men and may be perceived as a sign of weakness. Men who do it may be seen as “girly.” Politicians routinely criticize their opponents for being indecisive, for wafting or “flip-flopping” on issues. What a strange idea—that people shouldn’t change their positions if they’ve discovered there’s a better way. Males, females, and humanity may be equally victimized by aspects of cultural training.

SEX AND GENDER

Because anthropologists study biology, society, and culture, they are in a unique position to comment on nature (biological predispositions) and nurture (environment) as determinants of human behavior. Human attitudes, values, and behavior are limited not only by our genetic predispositions—which are often difficult to identify—but also by our experiences during enculturation.
Our attributes as adults are determined both by our genes and by our environment during growth and development.

Questions about nature and nurture emerge in the discussion of human sex-gender roles and sexuality. Men and women differ genetically. Women have two X chromosomes, and men have an X and a Y. The father determines a baby’s sex because only he has the Y chromosome to transmit. The mother always provides an X chromosome.

The chromosomal difference is expressed in hormonal and physiological contrasts. Humans are sexually dimorphic, more so than some primates, such as gibbons (small tree-living Asiatic apes), and less so than others, such as gorillas and orangutans. Sexual dimorphism refers to differences in male and female biology besides the contrasts in breasts and genitals. Women and men differ not just in primary (genitalia and reproductive organs) and secondary (breasts, voice, hair distribution) sexual characteristics but in average weight, height, strength, and longevity. Women tend to live longer than men and have excellent endurance capabilities. In a given population, men tend to be taller and to weigh more than women do. Of course, there is a considerable overlap between the sexes in terms of height, weight, and physical strength, and there has been a pronounced reduction in sexual dimorphism during human biological evolution.

Just how far, however, do such genetically and physiologically determined differences go? What effects do they have on the way men and women act and are treated in different societies? Anthropologists have discovered both similarities and differences in the roles of men and women in different cultures. The predominant anthropological position on sex-gender roles and biology may be stated as follows:

The biological nature of men and women [should be seen] not as a narrow enclosure limiting the human organism, but rather as a broad base upon which a variety of structures can be built. (Friedl 1975, p. 6)

Although in most societies men tend to be somewhat more aggressive than women are, many of the behavioral and attitudinal differences between the sexes emerge from culture rather than biology. Sex differences are biological, but gender encompasses all the traits that a culture assigns to and inculcates in males and females. “Gender,” in other words, refers to the cultural construction of whether one is female, male, or something else.

Given the “rich and various constructions of gender” within the realm of cultural diversity, Susan Bourque and Kay Warren (1987) note that the same images of masculinity and femininity do not always apply. Anthropologists have gathered systematic ethnographic data about similarities and differences involving gender in many cultural settings (Bonvillain 2007; Brettell and Sargent 2009; Gilmore 2001; Mascia-Lees and Black 2000; Nanda 2000; Ward and Edelstein 2009). Anthropologists can detect recurrent themes and patterns involving gender differences. They also can observe that gender roles vary with environment, economy, adaptive strategy, and type of political system. Before we examine the cross-cultural data, some definitions are in order.

Gender roles are the tasks and activities a culture assigns to the sexes. Related to gender roles are gender stereotypes, which are oversimplified but strongly held ideas about the characteristics of males and females. Gender stratification describes an unequal distribution of rewards (socially valued resources, power, prestige, human rights, and personal freedom) between men and women, reflecting their different positions in a social hierarchy. According to Ann Stoler (1977), the “economic determinants of gender status” include freedom or autonomy (in disposing of one’s labor and its fruits) and social power (control over the lives, labor, and produce of others).
explain differences and similarities. Data relevant to the cross-cultural study of gender can be drawn from the domains of economics, politics, domestic activity, kinship, and marriage. Table 9.1 shows cross-cultural data from 185 randomly selected societies on the division of labor by gender.

Remembering the discussion, in the chapter on culture, of universals, generalities, and particularities, the findings in Table 9.1 about the division of labor by gender illustrate generalities rather than universals. That is, among the societies known to ethnography, there is a very strong tendency for men to build boats, but there are exceptions. One was the Hidatsa, a Native American group in which the women made the boats used to cross the Missouri River. (Traditionally, the Hidatsa were village farmers and bison hunters on the North American Plains; they now live in North Dakota.) Another exception: Pawnee women worked wood; this is the only Native American group that assigned this activity to women. (The Pawnee, also traditionally Plains farmers and bison hunters, originally lived in what is now central Nebraska and central Kansas; they now live on a reservation in north central Oklahoma.) Among the Mbuti “pygmies” of Africa’s Ituri forest, women hunt by catching small, slow animals, using their hands or a net (Murdock and Provost 1973).

Exceptions to cross-cultural generalizations may involve societies or individuals. That is, a society like the Hidatsa can contradict the cross-cultural generalization that men build boats by assigning that task to women. Or, in a society where the cultural expectation is that only men build boats, a particular woman or women can contradict that expectation by doing the male activity. Table 9.1 shows that in a sample of 185 societies, certain activities (“swing activities”) are assigned to either or both men and women. Among the most important of such activities are planting, tending, and harvesting crops. We’ll see below that some societies customarily assign more farming chores to women, whereas others call on men to be the main farm laborers. Among the tasks almost always assigned to men (Table 9.1), some (e.g., hunting large animals on land and sea) seem clearly related to the greater average size and strength of males. Others, such as working wood and making musical instruments, seem more culturally arbitrary. And women, of course, are not exempt from arduous and time-consuming physical labor, such as gathering firewood and fetching water. In Arembepe, Bahia, Brazil, women routinely transport water in five-gallon tins, balanced on their heads, from wells and lagoons located at long distances from their homes.

Notice that Table 9.1 includes no mention of trade and market activity, in which either or both men and women are active. Is Table 9.1 somewhat
androcentric in detailing more tasks for men than for women? More than men, women do child care, but the study on which Table 9.1 is based does not break down domestic activities to the same extent that it details extradomestic ones. Think about Table 9.1 in terms of today’s home and job roles and with respect to the activities done by contemporary women and men. Men still do most of the hunting; either gender can collect the honey from a supermarket, even as most baby-bottom wiping (part of child care and not included in Table 9.1) continues to be in female hands.

Cross-culturally the subsistence contributions of men and women are roughly equal (Table 9.2). But in domestic activities and child care, female labor predominates, as we see in Tables 9.3 and 9.4. Table 9.3 shows that in about half the societies studied, men did virtually no domestic work.

Even in societies where men did some domestic chores, the bulk of such work was done by women. Adding together their subsistence activities and their domestic work, women tend to work more hours than men do. Has this changed in the contemporary world?

### Table 9.1
**Generalities in the Division of Labor by Gender, Based on Data from 185 Societies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generally Male Activities</th>
<th>Swing (Male or Female) Activities</th>
<th>Generally Female Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hunting large aquatic animals (e.g., whales, walrus)</td>
<td>Making fire</td>
<td>Gathering fuel (e.g., firewood)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smelting ores</td>
<td>Body mutilation</td>
<td>Making drinks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metalworking</td>
<td>Preparing skins</td>
<td>Gathering wild vegetal foods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lumbering</td>
<td>Gathering small land animals</td>
<td>Dairy production (e.g., churning)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunting large land animals</td>
<td>Planting crops</td>
<td>Spinning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working wood</td>
<td>Making leather products</td>
<td>Doing the laundry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunting fowl</td>
<td>Harvesting</td>
<td>Fetching water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making musical instruments</td>
<td>Tending crops</td>
<td>Cooking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trapping</td>
<td>Milking</td>
<td>Preparing vegetal food (e.g., processing cereal grains)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building boats</td>
<td>Making baskets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working stone</td>
<td>Carrying burdens</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working bone, horn, and shell</td>
<td>Making mats</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining and quarrying</td>
<td>Caring for small animals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting bones</td>
<td>Preserving meat and fish</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butchering*</td>
<td>Loom weaving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collecting wild honey</td>
<td>Gathering small aquatic animals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clearing land</td>
<td>Clothing manufacture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing</td>
<td>Making pottery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tending large herd animals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building houses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing the soil</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making nets</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making rope</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All the activities above “butchering” are almost always done by men; those from “butchering” through “making rope” usually are done by men.


### Table 9.2
**Time and Effort Expended on Subsistence Activities by Men and Women***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>More by men</th>
<th>Roughly equal</th>
<th>More by women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percentage of 88 randomly selected societies for which information was available on this variable.

**Source:** M. F. Whyte, “Cross-Cultural Codes Dealing with the Relative Status of Women,” Ethnology 17(2): 211–239.
What about child care? Women tend to be the main caregivers in most societies, but men often play a role. Again there are exceptions, both within and between societies. Table 9.4 uses cross-cultural data to answer the question “Who—men or women—has final authority over the care, handling, and discipline of children younger than four years?” Although women have primary authority over infants in two-thirds of the societies, there are still societies (18 percent of the total) in which men have the major say. In the United States and Canada today, some men are primary caregivers despite the cultural fact that the female role in child care remains more prominent in both countries. Given the critical role of breast-feeding in ensuring infant survival, it makes sense, for infants especially, for the mother to be the primary caregiver.

There are differences in male and female reproductive strategies. Women give birth, breast-feed, and assume primary responsibility for infant care. Women ensure that their progeny will survive by establishing a close bond with each baby. It’s also advantageous for a woman to have a reliable mate to ease the child-rearing process and ensure the survival of her children. (Again, there are exceptions, for example, the Nayars discussed in the chapter “Families, Kinship, and Descent.”) Women can have only so many babies during the course of their reproductive years, which begin after menarche (the advent of menstruation) and end with menopause (cessation of menstruation). Men, in contrast, have a longer reproductive period, which can last into the elder years. If they choose to do so, men can enhance their reproductive success by impregnating several women over a longer time period. Although men do not always have multiple mates, they do have a greater tendency to do so than women do (see Tables 9.5, 9.6, and 9.7). Among the societies known to ethnography, polygyny is much more common than polyandry is (see Table 9.5).

Men mate, within and outside marriage, more than women do. Table 9.6 shows cross-cultural data on premarital sex, and Table 9.7 summarizes the data on extramarital sex. In both cases men are less restricted than women are, although the restrictions are equal in about half the societies studied.

Double standards that restrict women more than men illustrate gender stratification. This chapter’s “Appreciating Diversity” shows how India, while formally offering equal rights to women, still denies them the privilege of moving...
Gender among Foragers

In foraging societies, gender stratification was most marked when men contributed much more to the diet than women did. This was true among the Inuit and other northern hunters and fishers. Among tropical and semitropical foragers, by contrast, gathering usually supplies more food than hunting and fishing do. Gathering is generally women’s work. Men usually hunt and fish, but women also do some fishing and may hunt small animals. When gathering is prominent, gender status tends to be more equal than it is when hunting and fishing are the main subsistence activities.

Gender status is also more equal when the domestic and public spheres aren’t sharply separated. (Domestic means within or pertaining to the home.) Strong differentiation between the home and the outside world is called the domestic-public dichotomy or the private-public contrast. The outside world can include politics, trade, warfare, or work. Often when domestic and public spheres are clearly separated, public activities have greater prestige than domestic ones do. This can promote gender stratification, because men are more likely to be active in the public domain than women are (see “Appreciating Diversity”). Cross-culturally, women’s activities tend to be closer to home than men’s are. Thus, another reason hunter-gatherers have less gender stratification than food producers do is that the domestic-public dichotomy is less developed among foragers.

We’ve seen that certain gender roles are more sex-linked than others. Men are the usual hunters and warriors. Given such tools and weapons as spears, knives, and bows, men make better hunters and fighters because they are bigger and stronger on the average than are women in the same population (Divale and Harris 1976). The male hunter-fighter role also reflects a tendency toward greater male mobility.

In foraging societies, women are either pregnant or lactating during most of their childbearing period. Late in pregnancy and after childbirth, carrying a baby limits a woman’s movements, even her gathering. However, among the Agta of the Philippines (Griffin and Estioko-Griffin, eds. 1985) women not only gather; they also hunt with dogs while carrying their babies with them. Still, given the effects of pregnancy and breast-feeding on mobility, it is rarely feasible for women to be the primary hunters (Friedl 1975). Warfare, which
A Women's Train for India

Human diversity is expressed in varied gender roles in different societies. Such roles, however, are changing with globalization. India is experiencing significant changes in work patterns and gender roles. Like women in the United States, although still to a lesser degree, more and more Indian women are entering the workforce, many in jobs that are part of a global economy based on services and information.

How should we evaluate the status of women in a society, such as India? India’s constitution guarantees equal rights for women. India has several prominent female political leaders. Indian law mandates equal pay for equal work, and there are laws against sexual harassment. Yet India still may be described as a patriarchal culture, where women are harassed routinely when they move from private (domestic) to public space. Described below is an attempt to offer women relief from the indignity of “eve teasing” as they commute to and from work.

PALWAL, India—As the morning commuter train rattled down the track, Chinu Sharma, an office worker, enjoyed the absence of men. Some of them pinch and grope women on trains, or shout insults and catcalls.

Up and down the jostling train, women repeated the same theme: As millions of women have poured into the Indian work force over the last decade, they have met with different obstacles in a tradition-bound, patriarchal culture, but few are more annoying than the basic task of getting to work.

The problems of taunting and harassment, known as eve teasing, are so persistent that in recent months the government has decided to simply remove men altogether. In a pilot program, eight new commuter trains exclusively for female passengers have been introduced in India’s four largest cities: New Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Calcutta.

The trains are known as Ladies Specials, and on one recent round trip in which a male reporter got permission to board, the women commuting between the industrial town of Palwal and New Delhi were very pleased.

“It’s so nice here,” said a teacher, Kiran Khas, who has commuted by train for 17 years. Ms. Khas said the regular trains were thronged with vegetable sellers, pickpockets, beggars and lots of men. “Here on this train,” she said, as if describing a miracle, “you can board anywhere and sit freely.”

India would seem to be a country where women have shattered the glass ceiling. The country’s most powerful politician, Sonia Gandhi, president of the Congress Party, is a woman. The country’s current president, a somewhat ceremonial position, is a woman. So are the foreign secretary and the chief minister of the country’s most populous state, Uttar Pradesh, and the new minister of railways.

India’s Constitution guarantees equal rights for women, while Indian law stipulates equal pay and punishment for sexual harassment.

But the reality is very different for the average working woman, many analysts say.

Since India began economic reforms in the early 1990s, women have entered the urban work force, initially as government office workers, but now increasingly as employees in the booming services sector or in professional jobs. Overall, the number of working women has roughly doubled in 15 years.

But violence against women has also increased, according to national statistics. Between 2003 and 2007, rape cases rose by more than 30 percent, kidnapping or abduction cases rose by more than 50 percent, while torture and molestation also jumped sharply.

Mala Bhandari, who runs an organization focused on women and children, said the influx of women into the workplace had eroded the traditional separation between public space (the workplace) and private space (the home). “Now that women have started occupying public spaces, issues will always arise,” she said. “And the first issue is security.” India’s newspapers are filled with accounts of the frictions wrought by so much social change.

Last week, a husband in Noida was brought in by the police and accused of beating his wife because she had cut her hair in a Western style. In June, four colleges in Kanpur tried to bar female students from wearing blue jeans, saying that they were “indecent” and that they contributed to rising cases of sexual harassment. After protests from female students, state officials ordered the colleges to drop the restriction.

For many years, women traveling by train sat with men, until crowding and security concerns prompted the railroad to reserve two compartments per train for women. But with trains badly overcrowded, men would break into cars for women and claim seats. Mumbai started operating two women-only trains in 1992, yet the program was never expanded. Then, with complaints rising from female passengers, Mamata Banerjee, the new minister of railways, announced the eight new Ladies Specials trains.

“It speaks of their coming of age and assertiveness,” said Mukesh Nigam, a high-ranking railway official.

Many men are not thrilled. Several female passengers said eve teasing was worse here in
northern India than elsewhere in the country. As the Ladies Special idled on Track 7 at the station in Palwal, a few men glared from the platform. The Ladies Special was far less crowded, with clean, padded benches and electric fans, compared with the dirty, darkened train on Track 6 filled with sullen men. Vandals sometimes write profanities on the Ladies Special, or worse. . . .

As the train began moving, one woman sat meditating. Nearby, an accountant read a Hindu prayer book, while college students gossiped a few rows away. “If you go to work, then you are independent, you earn some money and can help the family,” said Archana Gahlot, 25. “And if something happens to the marriage, you have something.” . . .

India has been described as a patriarchal culture, in which women routinely are harassed when they move from private (domestic) to public space. The women shown here enjoy their ride, unmolested, on the “Ladies Special” train from Palwal to Delhi, on September 10, 2009.

PART 2 Appreciating Cultural Diversity

also requires mobility, is not found in most foraging societies, nor is interregional trade well developed. Warfare and trade are two public arenas that can contribute to status inequality of males and females among food producers.

The Ju/'hoansi San illustrate the extent to which the activities and spheres of influence of men and women may overlap among foragers (Draper 1975). Traditional Ju/'hoansi gender roles were interdependent. During gathering, women discovered information about game animals, which they passed on to the men. Men and women spent about the same amount of time away from the camp, but neither worked more than three days a week. Between one-third and one-half of the band stayed home while the others worked.

The Ju/'hoansi saw nothing wrong in doing the work of the other gender. Men often gathered food and collected water. A general sharing ethos dictated that men distribute meat and that women share the fruits of gathering. Boys and girls of all ages played together. Fathers took an active role in raising children. Resources were adequate, and competition and aggression were discouraged. Exchangeability and interdependence of roles are adaptive in small groups.

Patricia Draper’s field work among the Ju/'hoansi is especially useful in showing the relationships between economy, gender roles, and stratification because she studied both foragers and a group of former foragers who had become sedentary. Most Ju/'hoansi are now sedentary, living near food producers or ranchers (see Kent 1992; Solway and Lee 1990; Wilmsen 1989).

Draper studied sedentary Ju/'hoansi at Mahopa, a village where they herded, grew crops, worked for wages, and did a small amount of gathering. Their gender roles were becoming more rigidly defined. A domestic–public dichotomy was developing as men traveled farther than women did. With less gathering, women were confined more to the home. Boys could gain mobility through herding, but girls’ movements were more limited. The equal and communal world of the bush was yielding to the social features of sedentary life. A differential ranking of men according to their herds, houses, and sons began to replace sharing. Males came to be seen as more valuable producers.

If there is some degree of male dominance in virtually every contemporary society, it may be because of changes such as those that have drawn the Ju/'hoansi into wage work, market sales, and thus the world capitalist economy. A historic interplay between local, national, and international forces influences systems of gender stratification (Ong 1989). In traditional foraging cultures, however, egalitarianism extended to the relations between the sexes. The social spheres, activities, rights, and obligations of men and women overlapped. Foragers’ kinship systems tend to be bilateral (calculated equally through males and females) rather than favoring either the mother’s side or the father’s side. Foragers may live with either the husband’s or the wife’s kin and often shift between one group and the other.

One last observation about foragers: It is among them that the public and private spheres are least separate, hierarchy is least marked, aggression and competition are most discouraged, and the rights, activities, and spheres of influence of men and women overlap the most. Our ancestors lived entirely by foraging until 10,000 years ago. If there is any most “natural” form of human society, it is best, although imperfectly, represented by foragers. Despite the popular stereotype of the club-wielding caveman dragging his mate by the hair, relative gender equality is a much more likely ancestral pattern.

GENDER AMONG HORTICULTURALISTS

Gender roles and stratification among cultivators vary widely, depending on specific features of the economy and social structure. Demonstrating this, Martin and Voorhies (1975) studied a sample of 515 horticultural societies, representing all parts of the world. They looked at several vari-
able, including descent and postmarital residence, the percentage of the diet derived from cultivation, and the productivity of men and women.

A descent group is one whose social unity and solidarity are based on a belief in common ancestry. Cross-culturally, two common rules serve to admit certain people as descent-group members while excluding others. With a rule of matrilineal descent, people join the mother’s group automatically at birth (as an ascribed status) and stay members throughout life. Matrilineal descent groups therefore include only the children of the group’s women. With patrilineal descent, people automatically have lifetime membership in the father’s group. The children of all the group’s men belong to the group. The children of the group’s women are excluded; they belong to their father’s group. Patrilineal descent is much more common than matrilineal descent. In a sample of 564 societies (Murdock 1957), about three times as many were found to be patrilineal (247 to 84) as matrilineal.

Societies with descent groups not only have membership rules; they also have rules about where members should live once they marry. With patrilocality, which is associated with patrilineal descent, the couple lives in the husband’s (father’s) community, so that related males stay put, as wives move to their husband’s village. A less common residence rule, associated with matrilineal descent, is matrilocal: Married couples live in the wife’s (mother’s) community, and their children grow up in their mother’s village. This rule keeps related women together.

Martin and Voorhies (1975) found women to be the main producers in horticultural societies. In 50 percent of those societies, women did most of the cultivating. In 33 percent, contributions to cultivation by men and women were equal. In only 17 percent did men do most of the work (Table 9.8). Women tended to do a bit more cultivating in matrilineal compared with patrilineal societies. They dominated horticulture in 64 percent of the matrilineal societies versus 50 percent of the patrilineal ones.

### TABLE 9.8 Male and Female Contributions to Production in Cultivating Societies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>HORTICULTURE (PERCENTAGE OF 104 SOCIETIES)</th>
<th>AGRICULTURE (PERCENTAGE OF 93 SOCIETIES)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women are primary cultivators</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men are primary cultivators</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal contributions to cultivation</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

kinswomen. Women controlled the production and distribution of food.

Iroquois women lived with their husbands and children in the family compartments of a communal longhouse. Women born in a longhouse remained there for life. Senior women, or matrons, decided which men could join the longhouse as husbands, and they could evict incompatible men. Women therefore controlled alliances between descent groups, an important political job in tribal society.

Iroquois women thus managed production and distribution. Social identity, succession to office and titles, and property all came through the female line, and women were prominent in ritual and politics. Related tribes made up a confederacy, the League of the Iroquois, with chiefs and councils.

A council of male chiefs managed military operations, but chiefly succession was matrilineal. That is, succession went from a man to his brother, his sister’s son, or another matrilineal relative. The matrons of each longhouse nominated a man as their representative. If the council rejected their first nominee, the women proposed others until one was accepted. Matrons constantly monitored the chiefs and could impeach them. Women could veto war declarations, withhold provisions for war, and initiate peace efforts. In religion, too, women shared power. Half the tribe’s religious practitioners were women, and the matrons helped select the others.

Reduced Gender Stratification—Matrifocal Societies

Nancy Tanner (1974) also found that the combination of male travel and a prominent female economic role reduced gender stratification and promoted high female status. She based this finding on a survey of the matrifocal (mother-centered, often with no resident husband-father) organization of certain societies in Indonesia, West Africa, and the Caribbean. Matrifocal societies are not necessarily matrilineal. A few are even patrilineal.

For example, Tanner (1974) found matrifocality among the Igbo of eastern Nigeria, who are patrilineal, patrilocal, and polygynous (men have multiple wives). Each wife had her own house, where she lived with her children. Women planted crops next to their houses and traded surpluses. Women’s associations ran the local markets, while men did the long-distance trading.

In a case study of the Igbo, Ifi Amadiume (1987) noted that either sex could fill male gender roles. Before Christian influence, successful Igbo women used wealth to take titles and acquire wives. Wives freed husbands (male and female) from domestic work and helped

Many jobs that men do in some societies are done by women in others, and vice versa. In West Africa, women play a prominent role in trade and marketing. In Togo, shown here, women dominate textile sales. Is there a textile shop near you? Who runs it?
them accumulate wealth. Female husbands were not considered masculine but preserved their femininity. Igbo women asserted themselves in women’s groups, including those of lineage daughters, lineage wives, and a community-wide women’s council led by titled women. The high status and influence of Igbo women rested on the separation of males from local subsistence and on a marketing system that encouraged women to leave home and gain prominence in distribution and—through these accomplishments—in politics.

**Matriarchy**

Cross-culturally, anthropologists have described tremendous variation in the roles of men and women, and the power differentials between them. If a patriarchy is a political system ruled by men, what would a matriarchy be? Would a matriarchy be a political system ruled by women, or a political system in which women play a much more prominent role than men do in social and political organization? Anthropologist Peggy Sanday (2002) has concluded that matriarchies exist, but not as mirror images of patriarchies. The superior power that men typically have in a patriarchy isn’t matched by women’s equally disproportionate power in a matriarchy. Many societies, including the Minangkabau of West Sumatra, Indonesia, whom Sanday has studied for decades, lack the substantial power...
differentials that typify patriarchal systems. Minangkabau women play a central role in social, economic, and ceremonial life and as key symbols. The primacy of matriliney and matriarchy is evident at the village level, as well as regionally, where seniority of matrilineal descent serves as a way to rank villages.

The four million Minangkabau constitute one of Indonesia’s largest ethnic groups. Located in the highlands of West Sumatra, their culture is based on the coexistence of matrilineal custom and a nature-based philosophy called adat, complemented by Islam, a more recent (16th-century) arrival. The Minangkabau view men and women as cooperative partners for the common good rather than competitors ruled by self-interest. People gain prestige when they promote social harmony rather than by vying for power. Sanday considers the Minangkabau a matriarchy because women are the center, origin, and foundation of the social order. Senior women are associated with the central pillar of the traditional house, the oldest one in the village. The oldest village in a cluster is called the “mother village.” In ceremonies, women are addressed by the term used for their mythical Queen Mother. Women control land inheritance, and couples reside matrilocally. In the wedding ceremony, the wife collects her husband from his household and, with her female kin, escorts him to hers. If there is a divorce, the husband simply takes his things and leaves. Yet despite the special position of women, the Minangkabau matriarchy is not the equivalent of female rule, given the Minangkabau belief that all decision making should be by consensus.

Increased Gender Stratification—Patrilineal-Patrilocal Societies

The Igbo are unusual among patrilineal-patrilocal societies, many of which have marked gender stratification. Martin and Voorhies (1975) link the decline of matriliny and the spread of the patrilineal-patrilocal complex (consisting of patrilineality, patrilocality, warfare, and male supremacy) to pressure on resources. Faced with scarce resources, patrilineal-patrilocal cultivators such as the Yanomami often wage warfare against other villages. This favors patrilocality and patriliney, customs that keep related men together in the same village, where they make strong allies in battle. Such societies tend to have a sharp domestic–public dichotomy, and men tend to dominate the prestige hierarchy. Men may use their public roles in warfare and trade and their greater prestige to symbolize and reinforce the devaluation or oppression of women.

The patrilineal-patrilocal complex characterizes many societies in highland Papua New Guinea. Women work hard growing and processing subsistence crops, raising and tending pigs (the main domesticated animal and a favorite food), and doing domestic cooking, but they are isolated from the public domain, which men control. Men grow and distribute prestige crops, prepare food for feasts, and arrange marriages. The men even get to trade the pigs and control their use in ritual.

In densely populated areas of the Papua New Guinea highlands, male–female avoidance is associated with strong pressure on resources (Lindenbaum 1972). Men fear all female contacts, including sex. They think that sexual contact with women will weaken them. Indeed, men see everything female as dangerous and polluting. They segregate themselves in men’s houses and hide their precious ritual objects from women. They delay marriage, and some never marry.

By contrast, the sparsely populated areas of Papua New Guinea, such as recently settled areas, lack taboos on male–female contacts. The image of woman as polluter fades, heterosexual intercourse is valued, men and women live together, and reproductive rates are high.
GENDER AMONG AGRICULTURALISTS

When the economy is based on agriculture, women typically lose their role as primary cultivators. Certain agricultural techniques, particularly plowing, have been assigned to men because of their greater average size and strength (Martin and Voorhies 1975). Except when irrigation is used, plowing eliminates the need for constant weeding, an activity usually done by women.

Cross-cultural data illustrate these contrasts in productive roles. Women were the main workers in 50 percent of the horticultural societies surveyed but in only 15 percent of the agricultural groups. Male subsistence labor dominated 81 percent of the agricultural societies but only 17 percent of the horticultural ones (Martin and Voorhies 1975) (see Table 9.8).

With the advent of agriculture, women were cut off from production for the first time in human history. Perhaps this reflected the need for women to stay closer to home to care for the larger numbers of children that typify agriculture, compared with less labor-intensive economies. Belief systems started contrasting men’s valuable extradomestic labor with women’s domestic role, now viewed as inferior. (Extradomestic means outside the home, within or pertaining to the public domain.) Changes in kinship and postmarital residence patterns also hurt women. Descent groups and polygyny declined with agriculture, and the nuclear family became more common. Living with her husband and children, a woman was isolated from her kin—women and cowives. Female sexuality is carefully supervised in agricultural economies; men have easier access to divorce and extramarital sex, reflecting a “double standard.”

Still, female status in agricultural societies is not inevitably bleak. Gender stratification is associated with plow agriculture rather than with intensive cultivation per se. Studies of peasant gender roles and stratification in France and Spain (Harding 1975; Reiter 1975), which have plow agriculture, show that people think of the house as the female sphere and the fields as the male domain. However, such a dichotomy is not inevitable, as my own research among Betsileo agriculturalists in Madagascar shows.

Betsileo women play a prominent role in agriculture, contributing a third of the hours invested in rice production. They have their customary tasks in the division of labor, but their work is more seasonal than men’s is. No one has much to do during the ceremonial season, between mid-June and mid-September. Men work in the rice fields almost daily the rest of the year. Women’s cooperative work occurs during transplanting (mid-September through November) and harvesting (mid-March through early May). Along with other members of the household, women do daily weeding in December and January. After the harvest, all family members work together winnowing the rice and then transporting it to the granary.

If we consider the strenuous daily task of husking rice by pounding (a part of food preparation rather than production per se), women actually contribute slightly more than 50 percent of the labor devoted to producing and preparing rice before cooking.

Not just women’s prominent economic role but traditional social organization enhances female status among the Betsileo. Although postmarital residence is mainly patrilocal, descent rules permit married women to keep membership in and a strong allegiance to their own descent groups. Kinship is broadly and bilaterally calculated (on both sides—as in contemporary North America). The Betsileo exemplify Aihwa Ong’s (1989) generalization that bilateral (and matrilineal) kinship systems, combined with subsistence economies in which the sexes have complementary roles in food production and distribution, have reduced gender stratification. Such features are common among Asian rice cultivators, such as the Ifugao of the Philippines (shown here).
Sometimes Betsileo women seek their own kinswomen as wives for their sons, reinforcing their own prominence in village life and continuing kin-based female solidarity in the village.

The Betsileo illustrate the idea that intensive cultivation does not necessarily entail sharp gender stratification. We can see that gender roles and stratification reflect not just the type of adaptive strategy but also specific cultural attributes. Betsileo women continue to play a significant role in their society’s major economic activity, rice production.

**Patriarchy and Violence**

Patriarchy describes a political system ruled by men in which women have inferior social and political status, including basic human rights. Barbara Miller (1997), in a study of systematic neglect of females, describes women in rural northern India as “the endangered sex.” Societies that feature a full-fledged patrilocal-patrilocal complex, replete with warfare and intervillage raiding, also typify patriarchy. Such practices as dowry murders, female infanticide, and clitoridectomy exemplify patriarchy, which extends from tribal societies such as the Yanomami to state societies such as India and Pakistan.

Although more prevalent in certain social settings than in others, family violence and domestic abuse of women are worldwide problems. Domestic violence certainly occurs in nuclear family settings, such as Canada and the United States. Cities, with their impersonality and isolation from extended kin networks, are breeding grounds for domestic violence.

We’ve seen that gender stratification is typically reduced in matrilineal, matrifocal, and bilateral societies in which women have prominent roles in the economy and social life. When a woman lives in her own village, she has kin nearby to look after and protect her interests. Even in patrilocal polygynous settings, women often count on the support of their consorts and sons in disputes with potentially abusive husbands. Such settings, which tend to provide a safe haven for women, are retracting rather than expanding in today’s world, however. Isolated families and patrilineal social forms have spread at the expense of matrilineality. Many nations have declared polygyny illegal. More and more women, and men, find themselves cut off from extended kin and families of orientation.

With the spread of the women’s rights movement and the human rights movement, attention to domestic violence and abuse of women has increased. Laws have been passed, and mediating institutions established. Brazil’s female-run police stations for battered women provide an example, as do shelters for victims of domestic abuse in the United States and Canada. But patriarchal institutions do persist in what should be a more enlightened world.

**Gender and Industrialism**

The domestic–public dichotomy, which is developed most fully among patrilineal-patrilocal food producers and plow agriculturalists, also has affected gender stratification in industrial societies, including the United States and Canada. However, gender roles have been changing rapidly in North America. The “traditional” idea that “a woman’s place is in the home” developed among middle- and upper-class Americans as industrialism spread after 1900. Earlier, pioneer women in the Midwest and West had been recognized as fully productive workers in farming and home industry. Under industrialism, attitudes about gendered work came to vary with class and region. In early industrial Europe, men, women, and children had flocked to factories as wage laborers. Enslaved Americans of both sexes had done grueling work in cotton fields. After abolition, southern African American women continued working as field hands and domestics. Poor white women labored in the South’s early cotton mills. In the 1890s, more than one million American women held menial, repetitive, and unskilled factory positions (Margolis 1984, 2000; Martin and Voorhies 1975). Poor immigrant, and African American women continued to work throughout the 20th century.

After 1900, European immigration produced a male labor force willing to work for wages lower than those of American-born men. Those immigrant men moved into factory jobs that previously had gone to women. As machine tools and mass production further reduced the need for female labor, the notion that women were biologically unfit for factory work began to gain ground (Martin and Voorhies 1975).

Maxine Margolis (1984, 2000) has shown how gendered work, attitudes, and beliefs have varied in response to American economic needs. For example, wartime shortages of men have promoted the idea that work outside the home is women’s patriotic duty. During the world wars, the notion that women are biologically unfit for hard physical labor faded. Inflation and the culture of consumption have also spurred female employment. When prices and/or demand rises, multiple paychecks help maintain family living standards.

The steady increase in female paid employment since World War II also reflects the baby
has been a dramatic change in behavior and attitudes since 1960, when 89 percent of all married men worked, compared with just 32 percent of married women. The comparable figures in 2007 were 77 percent and 62 percent. Ideas about the gender roles of males and females have changed. Compare your grandparents and your parents. Chances are you have a working mother, but your grandmother was more likely a stay-at-home mom. Your grandfather is more likely than your father to have worked in manufacturing and to have belonged to a union. Your father is more likely than your grandfather to have shared child care and domestic responsibilities. Age at marriage has been delayed for both men and women. College educations and professional degrees have increased. What other changes do you associate with the increase in female employment outside the home?

Table 9.10 details employment in the United States in 2006 by gender, income, and job type for year-round full-time workers. Overall, the ratio of female to male income rose from 68 percent in 1989 to 77 percent in 2006.

Today’s jobs aren’t especially demanding in terms of physical labor. With machines to do the heavy work, the smaller average body size and lesser average strength of women are no longer impediments to blue-collar employment. The main reason we don’t see more modern-day Rosies working alongside male riveters is that the U.S. workforce itself is abandoning heavy-goods manufacture. In the 1950s, two-thirds of American jobs were blue-collar, compared with less than 15 percent today. The location of those jobs has shifted within the world capitalist economy. Third World countries with cheaper labor produce steel, automobiles, and other heavy goods less expensively than the United States can, but the United States excels at services. The American boom and industrial expansion. American culture has traditionally defined clerical work, teaching, and nursing as female occupations. With rapid population growth and business expansion after World War II, the demand for women to fill such jobs grew steadily. Employers also found that they could increase their profits by paying women lower wages than they would have to pay retuming male war veterans.

Woman’s role in the home has been stressed during periods of high unemployment, although when wages fall or inflation occurs simultaneously, female employment may still be accepted. Margolis (1984, 2000) contends that changes in the economy lead to changes in attitudes toward and about women. Economic changes paved the way for the contemporary women’s movement, which also was spurred by the publication of Betty Friedan’s book *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 and the founding of NOW, the National Organization for Women, in 1966. The movement in turn promoted expanded work opportunities for women, including the goal of equal pay for equal work. Between 1970 and 2006, the female percentage of the American workforce rose from 38 to 47 percent. In other words, almost half of all Americans who work outside the home are women. Over 73 million women now have paid jobs, compared with 84 million men. Women now fill more than half (57 percent) of all professional jobs (*Statistical Abstract of the United States* 2009, p. 412). And it’s not mainly single women working, as once was the case. Table 9.9 presents figures on the ever-increasing cash employment of American wives and mothers.

Note in Table 9.9 that the cash employment of American married men has been falling while that of American married women has been rising. There

### TABLE 9.9 Cash Employment of American Mothers, Wives, and Husbands, 1960–2007*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE OF MARRIED WOMEN, HUSBAND PRESENT WITH CHILDREN UNDER SIX</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE OF ALL MARRIED WOMEN†</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE OF ALL MARRIED MEN‡</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Civilian population 16 years of age and older.
†Husband present.
‡Wife present.

The Feminization of Poverty

Alongside the economic gains of many American women stands an opposite extreme: the feminization of poverty. This refers to the increasing representation of women (and their children) among America’s poorest people. Women head over half of U.S. households with incomes below the poverty line. Feminine poverty has been a trend in the United States since World War II, but it has accelerated recently. In 1959, female-headed households accounted for just one-fourth of the American poor. Since then, that figure has more than doubled. About half the female poor are “in transition.” These are women who are confronting a temporary economic crisis caused by the departure, disability, or death of a husband. The other half are more permanently dependent on the welfare system or on friends or relatives who live nearby. The feminization of poverty and its consequences in regard to living standards and health are widespread even among wage earners. Many American women continue to work part-time for low wages and meager benefits.

Married couples are much more secure economically than single mothers are. The data in Table 9.11 demonstrate that the average income for married-couple families is more than twice that of families maintained by a woman. The average one-earner family maintained by a woman had an annual income of $31,808 in 2006. This was less than one-half the mean income ($69,716) of a married-couple household.

### TABLE 9.10  Earnings in the United States by Gender and Job Type for Year-Round Full-Time Workers, 2006*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>By Job Type</th>
<th>MEDIAN ANNUAL SALARY</th>
<th>RATIO OF EARNINGS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WOMEN</td>
<td>MEN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median earnings</td>
<td>$32,515</td>
<td>$42,261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management/business/financial</td>
<td>$50,278</td>
<td>$65,777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>43,005</td>
<td>61,950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales and office</td>
<td>30,365</td>
<td>41,244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>21,202</td>
<td>29,452</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*By occupation of job held longest.


mass education system has many inadequacies, but it does train millions of people for service- and information-oriented jobs, from salesclerks to computer operators.

During the world wars, the notion that women were biologically unfit for hard physical labor faded. World War II’s Rosie the Riveter—a strong, competent woman dressed in overalls and a bandanna—was introduced as a symbol of patriotic womanhood. Is there a comparable poster woman today? What does her image say about modern gender roles?
developing countries were addressed at the United Nations’ Fourth World Conference on Women held in 1995 in Beijing. In attendance were women’s groups from all over the world. Many of these were national and international NGOs (nongovernmental organizations), which work with women at the local level to augment productivity and improve access to credit.

It is widely believed that one way to improve the situation of poor women is to encourage them to organize. New women’s groups can in some cases revive or replace traditional forms of social organization that have been disrupted. Membership in a group can help women to mobilize resources, to rationalize production, and to reduce the risks and costs associated with credit. Organization also allows women to develop self-confidence and to decrease dependence on others. Through such organization, poor women throughout the world are working to determine their own needs and priorities, and to change things so as to improve their social and economic situation (Buvinic 1995).

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Sexual orientation refers to a person’s habitual sexual attraction to, and sexual activities with, persons of the opposite sex, heterosexuality; the same sex, homosexuality; or both sexes, bisexuality. Asexuality, indifference toward or lack of attraction to either sex, is also a sexual orientation. All four of these forms are found in contemporary North America and throughout the world. But each type of desire and experience holds different meanings for individuals and groups. For example, an asexual disposition may be

The feminization of poverty isn’t just a North American trend. The percentage of female-headed households has been increasing worldwide. In Western Europe, for example, it rose from 24 percent in 1980 to 30 percent in 2000. The figure ranges from below 20 percent in certain South Asian and Southeast Asian countries to almost 50 percent in certain African countries and the Caribbean (Buvinic 1995).

Why must so many women be solo household heads? Where are the men going, and why are they leaving? Among the causes are male migration, civil strife (men off fighting), divorce, abandonment, widowhood, unwed adolescent parenthood, and, more generally, the idea that children are women’s responsibility.

Globally, households headed by women tend to be poorer than are those headed by men. In one study, the percentage of single-parent families considered poor was 18 percent in Britain, 20 percent in Italy, 25 percent in Switzerland, 40 percent in Ireland, 52 percent in Canada, and 63 percent in the United States. Poverty, of course, has health consequences. Studies in Brazil, Zambia, and the Philippines show the survival rates of children from female-headed households to be inferior to those of other children (Buvinic 1995).

In the United States, the feminization of poverty is a concern of the National Organization for Women. NOW still exists, alongside many newer women’s organizations. The women’s movement has become international in scope and membership. And its priorities have shifted from mainly job-oriented to more broadly social issues. These include poverty, homelessness, women’s health care, day care, domestic violence, sexual assault, and reproductive rights (Calhoun, Light, and Keller 1997). These issues and others that particularly affect women in the
Hidden Women, Public Men–Public Women, Hidden Men

Generations of anthropologists have applied their field’s comparative, cross-cultural, and biochemical approaches to the study of sex and gender. To some extent at least, gender, sexual preferences, and even sexual orientation are culturally constructed. Here I describe a case in which popular culture and comments by ordinary Brazilians about beauty and sex led me to an analysis of some striking gender differences between Brazil and the United States.

For several years, one of Brazil’s top sex symbols was Roberta Close, whom I first saw in a furniture commercial. Roberta ended her pitch with an admonition to prospective furniture buyers to accept no substitute for the advertised product. “Things,” she warned, “are not always what they seem.”

Nor was Roberta. This petite and incredibly feminine creature was actually a man. Nevertheless, despite the fact that he—or she (speaking as Brazilians do)—is a man posing as a woman, Roberta won a secure place in Brazilian mass culture. Her photos decorated magazines. She was a panelist on a TV variety show and starred in a stage play in Rio with an actor known for his supermacho image. Roberta even inspired a well-known, and apparently heterosexual, pop singer to make a video honoring her. In it, she pranced around Rio’s Ipanema Beach in a bikini, showing off her ample hips and buttocks.

The video depicted the widespread male appreciation of Roberta’s beauty. As confirmation, one heterosexual man told me he had recently been on the same plane as Roberta and had been struck by her looks. Another man said he wanted to have sex with her. These comments, it seemed to me, illustrated striking cultural contrasts about gender and sexuality. In Brazil, a Latin American country noted for its machismo, heterosexual men did not feel that attraction toward a transvestite blemished their masculine identities.

Roberta Close can be understood in relation to a gender-identity scale that jumps from extreme femininity to extreme masculinity, with little in between. Masculinity is stereotyped as active and public, femininity as passive and domestic. The male–female contrast in rights and behavior is much stronger in Brazil than it is in North America. Brazilians confront a more rigidly defined masculine role than North Americans do.

The active–passive dichotomy also provides a stereotypical model for male–male sexual relations. One man is supposed to be the active, masculine (inserting) partner, whereas the other is the passive, effeminate one. The latter man is derided as a bicha (intestinal worm), but little stigma attaches to the inserter. Indeed, many “active” (and married) Brazilian men like to have sex with transvestite prostitutes, who are biological males.

If a Brazilian man is unhappy pursuing either active masculinity or passive effeminacy, there is one other choice—active femininity. For Roberta Close and others like her, the answer appears to be biological, reflecting genes or hormones. Another part may have to do with experiences during growth and development. But whatever the reasons for individual variation, culture always plays a role in molding individual sexual urges toward a collective norm. And such sexual norms vary from culture to culture.

What do we know about variation in sexual norms from society to society, and over time? A classic cross-cultural study (Ford and Beach 1951) found wide variation in attitudes about masturbation, bestiality (sex with animals), and homosexuality. Even in a single society, such as the United States, attitudes about sex differ over time and with socioeconomic status, region, and rural versus urban residence. However, even in the 1950s, prior to the “age of sexual permissiveness” (the pre-HIV period from the mid-1960s through the 1970s), research showed that almost all American men (92 percent) and more than half
cultural demand of ultramasculinity has yielded to a performance of ultrafemininity. These men-women form a third gender in relation to Brazil’s polarized male–female identity scale.

Transvestites like Roberta are particularly prominent in Rio de Janeiro’s annual Carnaval, when an ambience of inversion rules the city. In the culturally accurate words of the American popular novelist Gregory McDonald, who sets one of his books in Brazil at Carnaval time:

Everything goes topsy-turvy . . . Men become women; women become men; grown-ups become children; rich people pretend they’re poor; poor people, rich; sober people become drunkards; thieves become generous. Very topsy-turvy. (McDonald 1984, p. 154)

Most notable in this costumed inversion (DaMatta 1991), men dress as women. Carnaval reveals and expresses normally hidden tensions and conflicts as social life is turned upside down. Reality is illuminated through a dramatic presentation of its opposite.

of American women (54 percent) admitted to masturbation. In the famous Kinsey report (Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin 1948), 37 percent of the men surveyed admitted having had at least one sexual experience leading to orgasm with another male. In a later study of 1,200 unmarried women, 26 percent reported same-sex sexual activities. (Because Kinsey’s research relied on nonrandom samples, it should be considered merely illustrative, rather than a statistically accurate representation, of sexual behavior at the time.)

Sex acts involving people of the same sex were absent, rare, or secret in only 37 percent of 76 societies for which data were available in the Ford and Beach study (1951). In the others, various forms of same-sex sexual activity were considered normal and acceptable. Sometimes sexual relations between people of the same sex involved transvestism on the part of one of the partners.

This chapter’s “Appreciating Anthropology” describes how transvestites (men dressing as women) form a third gender in relation to Brazil’s polarized male–female identity scale. Transvestites, not uncommon in Brazil, are members of one gender (usually males) who dress as another (female). At the time of the case described in “Appreciating Anthropology,” a Brazilian man who wished to be changed surgically into a woman (transgendered) could not obtain the necessary operation in Brazil. Some men, including Roberta Close, as described in “Appreciating Anthropology,” traveled to Europe for the procedure. Today transgendered Brazilians are well known in Europe. In France, transvestites regardless of nationality commonly are referred to as “Brésiliennes” (the feminine form of the French word for Brazilian), so common are Brazilians among the transvestites in Europe. In Brazil many men do have sexual relations with transvestites, with little stigma attached, as described in “Appreciating Anthropology.”

Transvestism is perhaps the most common way of forming genders alternative to male and female.

Roberta Close, in her prime.

This is the final key to Roberta’s cultural meaning. She emerged in a setting in which male–female inversion is part of the year’s most popular festival. Transvestites are the pièces de résistance at Rio’s Carnaval balls, where they dress as scantily as the real women do. They wear postage-stamp bikinis, sometimes with no tops. Photos of real women and transformed ones vie for space in the magazines. It is often impossible to tell the born women from the hidden men. Roberta Close is a permanent incarnation of Carnaval—a year-round reminder of the spirit of Carnavals past, present, and yet to come.

Roberta emerged from a Latin culture whose gender roles contrast strongly with those of the United States. From small village to massive city, Brazilian males are public and Brazilian females are private creatures. Streets, beaches, and bars belong to the men. Although bikinis adorn Rio’s beaches on weekends and holidays, there are many more men than women there on weekdays. The men revel in their ostentatiously sexual displays. As they sun themselves and play soccer and volleyball, they regularly stroke their genitals to keep them firm. They are living publicly, assertively, and sexually in a world of men.

Brazilian men must work hard at this public image, constantly acting out their culture’s definition of masculine behavior. Public life is a play whose strong roles go to men. Roberta Close, of course, was a public figure. Given that Brazilian culture defines the public world as male, we can perhaps better understand now why the nation’s number one sex symbol has been a man who excels at performing in public as a woman.
Among the Chukchee of Siberia certain men (usually shamans or religious specialists) copied female dress, speech, and hairstyles and took other men as husbands and sex partners. Female shamans could join a fourth gender, copying men and taking wives. Among the Crow Indians, certain ritual duties were reserved for berdaches, men who rejected the male role of bison hunter, raider, and warrior and formed a third gender (Lowie 1935). Transvestism did not characterize male–male sex among the Sudanese Azande, who valued the warrior role (Evans-Pritchard 1970). Prospective warriors—young men aged 12 to 20—left their families and shared quarters with adult fighting men, who paid bridewealth for, and had sex with, them. During this apprenticeship, the young men did the domestic duties of women. Upon reaching warrior status, these young men took their own younger male brides. Later, retiring from the warrior role, Azande men married women. Flexible in their sexual expression, Azande males had no difficulty shifting from sex with older men (as male brides), to sex with younger men (as warriors), to sex with women (as husbands) (see Murray and Roscoe, eds. 1998).

An extreme example of tension involving male–female sexual relations in Papua New Guinea is provided by the Etoro (Kelly 1976), a group of 400 people who subsist by hunting and horticulture in the Trans-Fly region (Figure 9.3). The Etoro illustrate the power of culture in molding human sexuality. The following account, based on ethnographic field work by Raymond C. Kelly in the late 1960s, applies only to Etoro males and their beliefs. Etoro cultural norms prevented the male anthropologist who studied them from gathering comparable information about female attitudes. Note, also, that the activities described have been discouraged by missionaries. Since there has been no restudy of the Etoro specifically focusing on these activities,
the extent to which these practices continue today is unknown. For this reason, I’ll use the past tense in describing them.

Etoro opinions about sexuality were linked to their beliefs about the cycle of birth, physical growth, maturity, old age, and death. Etoro men believed that semen was necessary to give life force to a fetus, which was, they believed, implanted in a woman by an ancestral spirit. Sexual intercourse during pregnancy nourished the growing fetus. The Etoro believed that men had a limited lifetime supply of semen. Any sex act leading to ejaculation was seen as draining that supply, and as sapping a man’s virility and vitality. The birth of children, nurtured by semen, symbolized a necessary sacrifice that would lead to the husband’s eventual death. Heterosexual intercourse, required only for reproduction, was discouraged. Women who wanted too much sex were viewed as witches, hazardous to their husbands’ health. Etoro culture allowed heterosexual intercourse only about 100 days a year. The rest of the time it was tabooed. Seasonal birth clustering shows the taboo was respected.

So objectionable was male–female sex that it was removed from community life. It could occur neither in sleeping quarters nor in the fields. Coitus could happen only in the woods, where it was risky because poisonous snakes, the Etoro claimed, were attracted by the sounds and smells of male–female sex.

Although coitus was discouraged, sex acts between men were viewed as essential. Etoro believed that boys could not produce semen on their own. To grow into men and eventually give life force to their children, boys had to acquire semen orally from older men. From the age of 10 until adulthood, boys were inseminated by older men. No taboos were attached to this. Such oral insemination could proceed in the sleeping area or garden. Every three years, a group of boys around the age of 20 was formally initiated into manhood. They went to a secluded mountain lodge, where they were visited and inseminated by several older men.

Male–male sex among the Etoro was governed by a code of propriety. Although sexual relations between older and younger males were considered culturally essential, those between boys of the same age were discouraged. A boy who took semen from other youths was believed to be sapping their life force and stunting their growth. A boy’s rapid physical development might suggest that he was getting semen from other boys. Like a sex-hungry wife, he might be shunned as a witch.

These sexual practices among the Etoro rested not on hormones or genes but on cultural beliefs and traditions. The Etoro were an extreme example of a male–female avoidance pattern that has been widespread in Papua New Guinea and in patrilineal-patrilocial societies. The Etoro shared a cultural pattern, which Gilbert Herdt (1984) calls “ritualized homosexuality,” with some 50 other tribes in Papua New Guinea, especially in that country’s Trans-Fly region. These societies illustrate one extreme of a male–female avoidance pattern that is widespread in Papua New Guinea and indeed in many patrilineal-patrilocial societies.

Flexibility in sexual expression seems to be an aspect of our primate heritage. Both masturbation and same-sex sexual activity exist among chimpanzees and other primates. Male bonobos (pygmy chimps) regularly engage in a form of mutual masturbation known as “penis fencing.” Females get sexual pleasure from rubbing their genitals against those of other females (de Waal 1997). Our primate sexual potential is molded by culture, the environment, and reproductive necessity. Heterosexual coitus is practiced in all human societies—which, after all, must reproduce themselves—but alternatives are also widespread (Rathus, Nevid, and Fichner-Rathus 2010). Like gender roles and attitudes more generally, the sexual component of human personality and identity—just how we express our “natural” sexual urges—is a matter that culture and environment direct and limit.

Acing the Course

1. Gender roles are the tasks and activities that a culture assigns to each sex. Gender stereotypes are oversimplified ideas about attributes of males and females. Gender stratification describes an unequal distribution of rewards by gender, reflecting different positions in a social hierarchy. Cross-cultural comparison reveals some recurrent patterns involving the division of labor by

Summary

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gender and gender-based differences in reproductive strategies. Gender roles and gender stratification also vary with environment, economy, adaptive strategy, level of social complexity, and degree of participation in the world economy.

2. When gathering is prominent, gender status is more equal than it is when hunting or fishing dominates the foraging economy. Gender status is more equal when the domestic and public spheres aren’t sharply separated. Foragers lack two public arenas that contribute to higher male status among food producers: warfare and organized interregional trade.

3. Gender stratification also is linked to descent and residence. Women’s status in matrilineal societies tends to be high because descent-group membership, political succession, land allocation, and overall social identity come through female links. Women in many societies wield power and make decisions, or are central to social organization. Scarcity of resources promotes intervillage warfare, patriliny, and patrilocality. The localization of related males is adaptive for military solidarity. Men may use their warrior role to symbolize and reinforce the social devaluation and oppression of women.

4. With the advent of plow agriculture, women were removed from production. The distinction between women’s domestic work and men’s “productive” labor reinforced the contrast between men as public and valuable and women as homebound and inferior. Patriarchy describes a political system ruled by men in which women have inferior social and political status, including basic human rights. Some expressions of patriarchy include female infanticide, dowry murders, domestic abuse, and forced genital operations.

5. Americans’ attitudes toward gender vary with class and region. When the need for female labor declines, the idea that women are unfit for many jobs increases, and vice versa. Factors such as war, falling wages, and inflation help explain female cash employment and Americans’ attitudes toward it. Countering the economic gains of many American women is the feminization of poverty. This has become a global phenomenon, as impoverished female-headed households have increased worldwide.

6. There has been a recent tendency to see sexual orientation as fixed and biologically based. But to some extent, at least, all human activities and preferences, including erotic expression, are influenced by culture. Sexual orientation stands for a person’s habitual sexual attraction to, and activities with, persons of the opposite sex, heterosexuality; the same sex, homosexuality; or both sexes, bisexuality. Sexual norms vary widely from culture to culture.

### Key Terms
- domestic–public dichotomy 217
- extradomestic 225
- gender roles 213
- gender stereotypes 213
- gender stratification 213
- matrifocal 224
- matrilineal descent 221
- matrilocality 221
- patriarchy 226
- patrilineal descent 221
- patrilineal-patrilocal complex 224
- patrilocality 221
- sexual dimorphism 213
- sexual orientation 229

### MULTIPLE CHOICE

1. “The biological nature of men and women [should be seen] not as a narrow enclosure limiting the human organism, but rather as a broad base upon which a variety of structures can be built.”
   a. This statement reflects an idea that is a cultural generality, but not a cultural universal.
   b. This passage reflects the predominant anthropological position on sex-gender roles and biology.
   c. The basic assumptions in this passage are threatened by new medical technologies.
   d. This passage is culturally ethnocentric.
   e. This statement reflects ideas on gender and sex that ignore over 50 years of ethnographic evidence.

2. Traditionally among the Hidatsa, women made boats. Pawnee women worked wood. Among the Mbuti “pygmies,” women hunt. Cases such as these suggest that
   a. swing activities usually are done by women.
   b. biology has nothing to do with gender roles.
   c. anthropologists are overly optimistic about finding a society with perfect gender equality.
   d. swing activities usually are done by men.
d. patterns of division of labor by gender are culturally general—not universal.
e. exceptions to cross-cultural generalization are actually the rule.

3. Among foragers
   a. men excel in the harsh life and therefore accrue vastly more prestige than women.
   b. warfare makes men dominant over women.
   c. the status of women falls when they provide most of the food.
   d. the lack of a clear public-domestic dichotomy is related to relatively mild gender inequality.
e. men and women are completely equal; there is no gender inequality.

4. Which of the following statements about the domestic-public dichotomy is true?
   a. It is stronger among foragers than among peasants.
   b. It is not significant in urban industrial societies.
   c. It is stronger among peasants than among foragers.
   d. It is reinforced in American society by women working both inside and outside the home.
e. It is not present in the modern industrial states of the Western world.

5. Which of the following is not part of the patrilineal-patrilocal complex?
   a. patrilineality
   b. patrilocality
   c. warfare
   d. male supremacy
   e. reduced gender stratification

6. In what kind of society do anthropologists most typically find forced female genital operations, intervillage raiding, female infanticide, and dowry?
   a. patrilineal-patrilocal
   b. matrilineal-patrilocal
   c. matrilineal-matrilocal
   d. patrilineal-matrilocal
   e. patrilineal-neolocal

7. The “traditional” idea that “a woman’s place is in the home”
   a. developed among middle- and upper-class Americans as industrialism spread after 1900.
   b. is actually a cultural universal.
   c. accurately reflects the worldwide sexual division of labor.
   d. is based in the preindustrial era and began to disappear as women moved into the factories in the 1900s.
   e. was part of the Pledge of Allegiance until it was challenged in the early 1800s.

8. In comparing gender roles in different societies, which of the following is true?
   a. Equality between the genders is common among horticulturalists.
   b. There are many societies in which women control all the strategic resources and carry out the most prestigious activities.
   c. The more women contribute to the domestic sphere, the more publicly recognized power they achieve.
   d. The less women contribute to the public sphere, the more publicly recognized power they achieve.
   e. Patriarchies are strongest in societies in which men control significant goods that are exchanged with people outside the family.

9. What have recent cross-cultural studies of gender roles demonstrated?
   a. The gender roles of men and women are largely determined by their biological capabilities—such as relative strength, endurance, and intelligence.
   b. Women are subservient in nearly all societies because their subsistence activities contribute much less to the total diet than do those of men.
   c. Foraging, horticultural, pastoral, and industrial societies all have similar attitudes toward gender roles.
   d. The relative status of women is variable, depending on factors such as subsistence strategy, the importance of warfare, and the prevalence of a domestic-public dichotomy.
   e. Changes in the gender roles of men and women usually are associated with social decay and anarchy.

10. All of the following are key ideas to take away from this chapter’s discussion of sexual orientation except:
   a. Different types of sexual desires and experiences hold different meanings for individuals and groups.
   b. In a society, individuals will differ in the nature, range, and intensity of sexual interests and urges.
   c. Culture always plays a role in molding individual sexual urges toward a collective norm and these norms vary from culture to culture.
   d. Asexuality, indifference toward, or lack of attraction to either sex, is also a sexual orientation.
   e. There is conclusive scientific evidence that sexual orientation is genetically determined.
FILL IN THE BLANK

1. Sex differences are biological, while ______ refers to the cultural construction of whether one is female, male, or something else.
2. ______ refer to the tasks and activities that a culture assigns to the sexes.
3. In general, the status of women is higher in societies with ______ descent than in those with ______ descent.
4. ______ refers to an unequal distribution of socially valued resources, power, prestige, and personal freedom between men and women.
5. Americans’ attitudes towards gender vary with class and region. When the need for female labor declines, the idea that women are unfit for many jobs ______, and vice versa.

CRITICAL THINKING

1. How are sexuality, sex, and gender related to each other? What are the differences between these three concepts? Provide an argument about why anthropologists are uniquely positioned to study the relationship between sexuality, sex, and gender in society.
2. Using your own society, give an example of a gender role, a gender stereotype, and gender stratification.
3. Patricia Draper’s research among the Ju/’hoansi is especially useful in showing the relationships between economics, gender roles, and stratification because she studied both foragers and a group of former foragers who had become sedentary. What did she find? How does this case illustrate the historical interplay between local, national, and international forces?
4. What is the feminization of poverty? Where is this trend occurring, and what are some of its causes?
5. This chapter describes Raymond Kelly’s research among the Etoro of Papua New Guinea during the 1960s. What were his findings regarding Etoro male-female sexual relations? How did Kelly’s own gender affect some of the content and extent of his study? Can you think of other research projects where the ethnographer’s gender would have an impact?
Blackwood, E., and S. Wieringa, eds.

Bonvillain, N.

Brettell, C. B., and C. F. Sargent, eds.

M. S., and M. A. Messner, eds.

Rathus, S. A., J. S. Nevid, and J. Fichner-Rathus

Ward, M. C., and M. Edelstein

Go to our Online Learning Center website at www.mhhe.com/kottak for Internet exercises directly related to the content of this chapter.
This polygynous family (a man with multiple wives) in Mali, West Africa, displays their normal weekly diet on the roof of their mud-brick home. Ethnographers have studied many family types besides the nuclear family—the traditional American ideal.

- Why and how do anthropologists study kinship?
- How do families and descent groups differ, and what are their social correlates?
- How is kinship calculated, and how are relatives classified, in various societies?
Families, Kinship, and Descent
### Understanding Ourselves

Although it still is something of an ideal in our culture, the nuclear family (mother, father, and biological children) now accounts for fewer than one-fourth of all American households. Such phrases as “love and marriage,” “marriage and the family,” and “mom and pop” no longer apply to a majority of American households. What kind of family raised you? Perhaps it was a nuclear family. Or maybe you were raised by a single parent, with or without the help of extended kin. Perhaps your extended kin acted as your parents. Or maybe you had a stepparent and/or step- or half-siblings in a blended family. Maybe your family matches none of these descriptions, or fits different descriptions at different times.

Although contemporary American families may seem amazingly diverse, other cultures offer family alternatives that Americans might have trouble understanding. Imagine a society in which someone doesn’t know for sure, and doesn’t care much about, who his actual mother was. Consider Joseph Rabe, a Betsileo man who was my field assistant in Madagascar. Rabe, who had been raised by his aunt—his father’s sister—told me about two sisters, one of whom was his mother and the other his mother’s sister. He knew their names, but he didn’t know which was which. Illustrating an adoptive pattern common among the Betsileo, Rabe was given as a toddler to his childless aunt. His mother and her sister lived far away and died in his childhood (as did his father), and so he didn’t really know them. But he was very close to his father’s sister, for whom he used the term for mother. Indeed, he had to call her that because the Betsileo have only one kin term, *reny*, for mother, mother’s sister, and father’s sister. (They also use a single term, *ray*, for father and all uncles.) The difference between “real” (biologically based) and socially constructed kinship didn’t matter to Rabe.

Contrast the Betsileo case with Americans’ attitudes about kinship and adoption. On family-oriented radio talk shows, I’ve heard hosts distinguish between “birth mothers” and adoptive mothers, and between “sperm daddies” and “daddies of the heart.” The latter may be adoptive fathers, or stepfathers who have “been like fathers” to someone. American culture tends to promote the idea that kinship is, and should be, biological. It’s increasingly common for adopted children to seek out their birth parents (which used to be discouraged as disruptive), even after a perfectly satisfactory upbringing in an adoptive family. The American emphasis on biology for kinship is seen also in the recent proliferation of DNA testing. Viewing our beliefs through the lens of cross-cultural comparison helps us appreciate that kinship and biology don’t always converge, nor do they need to.

### Families

The kinds of societies anthropologists have studied traditionally, including many examples considered in this chapter, have stimulated a strong interest in families, along with larger systems of kinship, descent, and marriage. Cross-culturally, the social construction of kinship illustrates considerable diversity. Understanding kinship systems has become an essential part of anthropology because of the importance of those systems to the people we study.
We are ready to take a closer look at the systems of kinship and descent that have organized human life during much of our history.

Ethnographers quickly recognize social divisions—groups—within any society they study. During field work, they learn about significant groups by observing their activities and composition. People often live in the same village or neighborhood or work, pray, or celebrate together because they are related in some way. To understand the social structure, an ethnographer must investigate such kin ties. For example, the most significant local groups may consist of descendants of the same grandfather. These people may live in neighboring houses, farm adjoining fields, and help each other in everyday tasks. Other sorts of groups, based on different or more distant kin links, get together less often.

The nuclear family is one kind of kin group that is widespread in human societies. The nuclear family consists of parents and children, normally living together in the same household. Other kin groups include extended families (families consisting of three or more generations) and descent groups—lineages and clans. Such groups are not usually residentially based as the nuclear family is. Extended family members get together from time to time, but they don’t necessarily live together. Branches of a given descent group may reside in several villages and rarely assemble for common activity. Descent groups, which are composed of people claiming common ancestry, are basic units in the social organization of nonindustrial food producers.

Nuclear and Extended Families

A nuclear family 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 the children. Since most societies permit divorce, some people establish more than one family through marriage.

Anthropologists distinguish between the family of orientation (the family in which one is born and grows up) and the family of procreation (formed when one marries and has children). From the individual’s point of view, the critical relationships are with parents and siblings in the family of orientation and with spouse and children in the family of procreation.

In most societies, relations with nuclear family members (parents, siblings, and children) take precedence over relations with other kin. Nuclear family organization is very widespread but not universal, and its significance in society differs greatly from one place to another. In a few societies, such as the classic Nayar case described below, nuclear families are rare or nonexistent. In others, the nuclear family plays no special role in social life. The nuclear family is not always the basis of residence or authority organization. Other social units—most notably descent groups and extended families—can assume many of the functions otherwise associated with the nuclear family.

Consider an example from the former Yugoslavia. Traditionally, among the Muslims of western Bosnia (Lockwood 1975), nuclear families lacked autonomy. Several such families were embedded in an extended family household called a zadruga. The zadruga was headed by a male household head and his wife, the senior woman. It also included married sons and their wives and children, and unmarried sons and daughters. Each nuclear family had a sleeping room, decorated and partly furnished from the bride’s trousseau. However, possessions—even clothing items—were freely shared by zadruga members. Even trousseau items were appropriated for use elsewhere. Such a residential unit is known as a patrilocal extended family, because each couple resides in the husband’s father’s household after marriage.

The zadruga took precedence over its component units. Social interaction was more usual among women, men, or children than between spouses or between parents and children. Larger...
children under seven went with the mother. Older children could choose between their parents. Children were considered part of the household where they were born even if their mother left. One widow who remarried had to leave her five children, all over seven, in their father’s zadruga, headed by his brother.

Another example of an alternative to the nuclear family is provided by the Nayars (or Nair), a large and powerful caste on the Malabar Coast of southern India (Figure 10.1). Their traditional kinship system was matrilineal (descent traced only through females). Nayars lived in matrilineal extended family compounds called tarawads. The tarawad was a residential complex with several buildings, its own temple, granary, water well, orchards, gardens, and land holdings. Headed by a senior woman, assisted by her brother, the tarawad housed her siblings, sisters’ children, and other matrikin—matrilineal relatives (Gough 1959; Shivaram 1996).
explained as an adaptation to poverty (Stack 1975). Unable to survive economically as nuclear family units, relatives may band together in an expanded family household and pool their resources. This photo, taken in 2002 in Munich, Germany, shows German Roma, or Gypsies. Together with her children and grandchildren, this grandmother resides in an expanded family household.

**Industrialism and Family Organization**

For many Americans and Canadians, the nuclear family is the only well-defined kin group. Family isolation arises from geographic mobility, which is associated with industrialism, so that a nuclear family focus is characteristic of many modern nations. Born into a family of orientation, North Americans leave home for work or college, and the break with parents is under way. Eventually most North Americans marry and start a family of procreation. Because less than 3 percent of the U.S. population now farms, most people aren’t tied to the land. Selling our labor on the market, we often move to places where jobs are available.

Many married couples live hundreds of miles from their parents. Their jobs have determined where they live. Such a postmarital residence pattern is called **neolocality**: Married couples are expected to establish a new place of residence—a “home of their own.” Among middle-class North Americans, neolocal residence is both a cultural preference and a statistical norm. Most middle-class Americans eventually establish households and nuclear families of their own.

Within stratified nations, value systems vary to some extent from class to class, and so does kinship. There are significant differences between middle-class and poorer North Americans. For example, in the lower class the incidence of **expanded family households** (those that include non-nuclear relatives) is greater than it is in the middle class. When an expanded family household includes three or more generations, it is an **extended family household**, such as the zadruga. Another type of expanded family is the **collateral household**, which includes siblings and their spouses and children.

The higher proportion of expanded family households among poorer Americans has been explained as an adaptation to poverty (Stack 1975). Unable to survive economically as nuclear family units, relatives band together in an expanded household and pool their resources. Adaptation to poverty causes kinship values and attitudes to diverge from middle-class norms. Thus, when North Americans raised in poverty achieve financial success, they often feel obligated to emphasize the affiliation and legitimacy of their non-nuclear relatives.
appreciating DIVERSITY

Social Security, Kinship Style

In all societies people care for others. Sometimes, as in our own state-organized society, social security is a function of government as well as of the individual and the family. In other societies, such as Arembepe, as described here, social security is part of systems of kinship, marriage, and fictive kinship.

My book Assault on Paradise, 4th edition (Kotak 2006), describes social relations in Arembepe, the Brazilian fishing community I’ve studied since the 1960s. When I first studied Arembepe, I was struck by how similar its social relations were to those in the egalitarian, kin-based societies anthropologists have studied traditionally. The twin assertions “We’re all equal here” and “We’re all relatives here” were offered repeatedly as Arembepeiros’ summaries of the nature and basis of local life. Like members of a clan (who claim to share common ancestry, but who can’t say exactly how they are related), most villagers couldn’t trace precise genealogical links to their distant kin.

“What difference does it make, as long as we know we’re relatives?”

As in most nonindustrial societies, close personal relations were either based or modeled on kinship. A degree of community solidarity was promoted, for example, by the myth that everyone was kin. However, social solidarity was actually much less developed in Arembepe than in societies with clans and lineages—which use genealogy to include some people, and exclude others from membership, in a given descent group. Intense social solidarity demands that some people be excluded. By asserting they all were related—that is, by excluding no one—Arembepeiros were actually weakening kinship’s potential strength in creating and maintaining group solidarity.

Rights and obligations always are associated with kinship and marriage. In Arembepe, the closer the kin connection and the more formal the marital tie, the greater the rights and obligations. Couples could be married formally or informally. The most common union was a stable common-law marriage. Less common, but with more prestige, was legal (civil) marriage, performed by a justice of the peace and conferring inheritance rights. The union with the most prestige combined legal validity with a church ceremony.

The rights and obligations associated with kinship and marriage constituted the local social security system, but people had to weigh the benefits of the system against its costs. The most obvious cost was this: Villagers had to share in proportion to their success. As ambitious men climbed the local ladder of success, they got more dependents. To maintain their standing in public opinion, and to guarantee that they could depend on others in old age, they had to share. However, sharing was a powerful leveling mechanism. It drained surplus wealth and restricted upward mobility.

How, specifically, did this leveling work? As is often true in stratified nations, Brazilian national cultural norms are set by the upper classes. Middle- and upper-class Brazilians usually marry legally and in church. Even Arembepeiros knew this was the only “proper” way to provide financial help to a wide circle of less fortunate relatives. This chapter’s “Appreciating Diversity” shows how poor Brazilians use kinship, marriage, and fictive kinship as a form of social security.

Changes in North American Kinship

Although the nuclear family remains a cultural ideal for many Americans, Table 10.1 and Figure 10.2 show that nuclear families accounted for only about 23 percent of American households in 2007. Other domestic arrangements now outnumber the “traditional” American household much more than four to one. There are several reasons for this changing household composition. Women increasingly are joining men in the cash workforce. This often removes them from their family of orientation while making it economically feasible to delay marriage.

Furthermore, job demands compete with romantic attachments. The median age at first marriage for American women rose from 21 years in 1970 to 26 in 2008. For men the comparable ages were 23 and 27 (U.S. Census Bureau 2009).

Also, the U.S. divorce rate has risen, making divorced Americans much more common today than they were in 1970. Between 1970 and 2007 the number of divorced Americans quintupled—some 23 million in 2007 versus 4.3 million in 1970. (Note, however, that each divorce creates two divorced people.) Table 10.2 shows the ratio of divorces to marriages in the United States for selected years between 1950 and 2006. The major jump in the American divorce rate took place between 1960 and 1980. During that period the ratio of divorces to marriage doubled. Since 1980 the ratio has stayed the same, slightly below 50 percent. That is, each year there are about half as many new divorces as there are new marriages.
to marry. The most successful and ambitious local men copied the behavior of elite Brazilians. By doing so, they hoped to acquire some of their prestige.

However, legal marriage drained individual wealth, for example, by creating a responsibility to help one’s in-laws financially. Such obligations could be regular and costly. Obligations to kids also increased with income, because successful people tended to have more living children. Children were valued as companions and as an eventual economic benefit to their parents. Boys especially were prized because their economic prospects were so much brighter than those of girls.

Children’s chances of survival surged dramatically in wealthier households with better diets. The normal household diet included fish—usually in a stew with tomatoes, onions, palm oil, vinegar, and lemon. Dried beef replaced fish once a week. Roasted manioc flour was the main source of calories and was eaten at all meals. Other daily staples included coffee, sugar, and salt. Fruits and vegetables were eaten in season. Diet was one of the main contrasts between households. The poorest people didn’t eat fish regularly; often they subsisted on manioc flour, coffee, and sugar. Better-off households supplemented the staples with milk, butter, eggs, rice, beans, and more ample portions of fresh fish, fruits, and vegetables.

Adequate incomes bought improved diets and provided the means and confidence to seek out better medical attention than was locally available. Most of the children born in the wealthier households survived. But this meant more mouths to feed, and (since the heads of such households usually wanted a better education for their children) it meant increased expenditures on schooling. The correlation between economic success and large families was a siphoner of wealth that restricted individual economic advance. Tomé, a fishing entrepreneur, envisioned a life of constant hard work if he was to feed, clothe, and educate his growing family. Tomé and his wife had never lost a child. But he recognized that his growing family would, in the short run, be a drain on his resources. “But in the end, I’ll have successful sons to help their mother and me, if we need it, in our old age.”

Arembepeiros knew who could afford to share with others; success can’t be concealed in our old age.”

Adequate incomes bought improved diets and provided the means and confidence to seek out better medical attention than was locally available. Most of the children born in the wealthier households survived. But this meant more mouths to feed, and (since the heads of such households usually wanted a better education for their children) it meant increased expenditures on schooling. The correlation between economic success and large families was a siphoner of wealth that restricted individual economic advance. Tomé, a fishing entrepreneur, envisioned a life of constant hard work if he was to feed, clothe, and educate his growing family. Tomé and his wife had never lost a child. But he recognized that his growing family would, in the short run, be a drain on his resources. “But in the end, I’ll have successful sons to help their mother and me, if we need it, in our old age.”

Arembepeiros knew who could afford to share with others; success can’t be concealed in a small community. Villagers based their expectations of others on this knowledge. Successful people had to share with more kin and in-laws, and with more distant kin, than did poorer people. Successful captains and boat owners were expected to buy beer for ordinary fishermen; store owners had to sell on credit. As in bands and tribes, any well-off person was expected to exhibit a corresponding generosity. With increasing wealth, people were also asked more frequently to enter ritual kin relationships. Through baptism—which took place twice a year when a priest visited, or which could be done outside—a child acquired two godparents. These people became the coparents (compadres) of the baby’s parents. The fact that ritual kinship obligations increased with wealth was another factor limiting individual economic advance.

We see that kinship, marriage, and ritual kinship in Arembepe had costs and benefits. The costs were limits on the economic advance of individuals. The primary benefit was social security—guaranteed help from kin, in-laws, and ritual kin in times of need. Benefits, however, came only after costs had been paid—that is, only to those who had lived “proper” lives, not deviating too noticeably from local norms, especially those about sharing.

The rate of growth in single-parent families also has outstripped population growth, quintupling from fewer than 4 million in 1970 to 19 million in 2007. (The overall American population in 2007 was 1.5 times its size in 1970.) The percentage (23 percent) of children living in fatherless (mother-headed, no resident dad) households in 2007 was more than twice the 1970 rate, while the percentage (3 percent) in motherless (father-headed, no resident mom) homes increased fourfold. About 56 percent of American women and 60 percent of American men were currently married in 2006, versus 60 and 65 percent, respectively, in 1970 (Fields 2004; Fields and Casper 2001; Statistical Abstract of the United States 2009). Recent census data also reveal that more American women are now living without a husband than with one. In 2005, 51 percent of women said they were living without a spouse, compared with 35 percent in 1950 and 49 percent in 2000 (Roberts et al. 2007).

To be sure, contemporary Americans maintain social lives through work, friendship, sports, clubs, religion, and organized social activities. However, the growing isolation from kin that these figures suggest may well be unprecedented in human history.

Table 10.3 documents similar changes in family and household size in the United States and Canada between 1980 and 2007. Those figures confirm a general trend toward smaller families and living units in North America. This trend is also detectable in Western Europe and other industrial nations.

The entire range of kin attachments is narrower for North Americans, particularly those in the middle class, than it is for nonindustrial peoples. Although we recognize ties to grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins, we have less contact with, and depend less on, those relatives than people in other cultures do. We see this when we...
answer a few questions: Do we know exactly how we are related to all our cousins? How much do we know about our ancestors, such as their full names and where they lived? How many of the people with whom we associate regularly are our relatives?

Differences in the answers to these questions by people from industrial and those from nonindustrial societies confirm the declining importance of kinship in contemporary nations. Immigrants are often shocked by what they perceive as weak kinship bonds and lack of proper respect for family in contemporary North America. In fact, most of the people whom middle-class North Americans see every day are either nonrelatives or members of the nuclear family. On the other hand, Stack’s (1975) study of welfare-dependent families in a ghetto area of a midwestern city showed that sharing with nonnuclear relatives is an important strategy that the urban poor use to adapt to poverty.

One of the most striking contrasts between the United States and Brazil, the two most populous nations of the Western Hemisphere, is in the meaning and role of the family. Contemporary North American adults usually define their families as consisting of their husbands or wives and their children. However, when middle-class Brazilians talk about their families, they mean their parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins. Later they add their children, but rarely the husband or wife, who has his or her own family. The children are shared by the two families. Because middle-class Americans lack an extended family support system, marriage assumes

---

**TABLE 10.1 Changes in Family and Household Organization in the United States, 1970 versus 2007**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1970</th>
<th>2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Numbers:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of households</td>
<td>63 million</td>
<td>116 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of people per household</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percentages:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married couples living with children</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family households</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households with five or more people</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People living alone</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of single-mother families</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of single-father families</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households with own children under 18</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FIGURE 10.2 Households by Type: Selected Years, 1970 to 2007 (Percent Distribution).**

Unlike middle-class couples in industrial nations, foragers don’t usually reside neolocally. Instead, they join a band in which either the husband or the wife has relatives. However, couples and families may move from one band to another several times. Although nuclear families are ultimately as impermanent among foragers as they are in any other society, they are usually more stable than bands are.

Many foraging societies lacked year-round band organization. The Native American Shoshoni of the Great Basin in Utah and Nevada (Figure 10.3) more importance. The husband–wife relationship is supposed to take precedence over either spouse’s relationship with his or her own parents. This places a significant strain on North American marriages.

Living in a less mobile society, Brazilians stay in closer contact with their relatives, including members of the extended family, than North Americans do. Residents of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, two of South America’s largest cities, are reluctant to leave those urban centers to live away from family and friends. Brazilians find it hard to imagine, and unpleasant to live in, social worlds without relatives. Contrast this with a characteristic American theme: learning to live with strangers.

The Family among Foragers

Populations with foraging economies are far removed from industrial societies in terms of social complexity, but they do feature geographic mobility, which is associated with nomadic or semi-nomadic hunting and gathering. Here again the nuclear family is often the most significant kin group, although in no foraging society is the nuclear family the only group based on kinship. The two basic social units of traditional foraging societies are the nuclear family and the band.

### TABLE 10.2 Ratio of Divorces to Marriages per 1,000 U.S. Population, Selected Years, 1950–2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rate</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### TABLE 10.3 Household and Family Size in the United States and Canada, 1980 versus 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1980</th>
<th>2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average family size:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average household size:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Figure 10.3** Location of the Shoshoni.
Descent groups may be lineages or clans. Common to both is the belief that members descend from the same apical ancestor. That person stands at the apex, or top, of the common genealogy. For example, Adam and Eve, according to the Bible, are the apical ancestors of all humanity. Since Eve is said to have come from Adam’s rib, Adam stands as the original apical ancestor for the patrilineage that ultimately includes Jews and Arabs (who share Abraham as their last common apical ancestor).

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. The Betsileo of Madagascar have both clans and lineages. Descent may be demonstrated for the most recent 8 to 10 generations, then stipulated for the more remote past—sometimes with mermaids and vaguely defined foreign royalty mentioned among the founders (Kottak 1980). Like the Betsileo, many societies have both lineages and clans. In such a case, clans have more members and cover a larger geographic area than lineages do. Sometimes a clan’s apical ancestor is not a human at all but an animal or plant (called a totem). Whether human or not, the ancestor symbolizes the social unity and identity of the members, distinguishing them from other groups.

The economic types that usually have descent-group organization are horticulture, pastoralism, and agriculture, as discussed in the chapter “Making a Living.” Such societies tend to have several descent groups. Any one of them may be confined to a single village, but they usually span more than one village. Any branch of a descent group that lives in one place is a local descent group. Two or more local branches of different descent groups may live in the same village. Descent groups in the same village or
different villages may establish alliances through frequent intermarriage.

Lineages, Clans, and Residence Rules
As we’ve seen, descent groups, unlike nuclear families, are permanent and enduring units, with new members added in every generation. Members have access to the lineage estate, where some of them must live, in order to benefit from and manage that estate across the generations. To endure, descent groups need to keep at least some of their members at home, on the ancestral estate. An easy way to do this is to have a rule about who belongs to the descent group and where they should live after they get married. Patrilineal and matrilineal descent, and the postmarital residence rules that usually accompany them, ensure that about half the people born in each generation will live out their lives on the ancestral estate. Neolocal residence, which is the rule for most middle-class Americans, isn’t very common outside modern North America, Western Europe, and the European-derived cultures of Latin America.

Much more common is patrilocality: A married couple moves to the husband’s father’s community, so that the children will grow up in their father’s village. Patrilocality is associated with patrilineal descent. This makes sense. If the group’s male members are expected to exercise their rights in the ancestral estate, it’s a good idea to raise them on that estate and to keep them there after they marry.

A less common postmarital residence rule, associated with matrilineal descent, is matrilocality: Married couples live in the wife’s mother’s community, and their children grow up in their mother’s village. Together, patrilocality and matrilocality are known as unilocal rules of postmarital residence.

Ambilineal Descent
The descent rules examined so far admit certain people as members while excluding others. A unilineal rule uses one line only, either the female or the male. Besides the unilinear rules, there is another descent rule called nonunilinear or ambilineal descent. As in any descent group, membership comes through descent from a common ancestor. However, ambilineal groups differ from unilineal groups in that they do not automatically exclude either the children of sons or those of daughters. People can choose the descent group they join (for example, that of their father’s father, father’s mother, mother’s father, or mother’s mother). People also can change their descent-group membership, or belong to two or more groups at the same time.
Compared with patrilineal systems, matrilineal societies tend to have higher divorce rates and greater female promiscuity (Schneider and Gough, eds. 1961). According to Nicholas Kottak (2002), among the matrilineal Makua of northern Mozambique, a husband is concerned about his wife’s potential promiscuity. A man’s sister also takes an interest in her brother’s wife’s fidelity; she doesn’t want her brother wasting time on children who may not be his, thus diminishing his investment as an uncle (mother’s brother) in her children. A confessional ritual that is part of the Makua birthing process demonstrates the sister’s allegiance to her brother. When a wife is deep in labor, the husband’s sister, who attends her, must ask, “Who is the real father of this child?” If the wife lies, the Makua believe the birth will be difficult, often ending in the death of the woman and/or the baby. This ritual serves as an important social paternity test. It is in both the husband’s and his sister’s interest to ensure that his wife’s children are indeed his own.

KINSHIP CALCULATION
In addition to studying kin groups, anthropologists are interested in kinship calculation: the system by which people in a society reckon kin relationships. To study kinship calculation, an ethnographer must first determine the word or words for different types of “relatives” used in a particular language and then ask questions such as, “Who are your relatives?” Like race and gender (discussed in other chapters), kinship is culturally constructed. This means that some genealogical kin are considered to be relatives whereas others are not. It also means that even people who aren’t genealogical relatives can be constructed socially as kin. Read this chapter’s “Appreciating Anthropology,” which describes ethnographic findings about the Barí of Venezuela. The Barí recognize multiple fathers, even though biologically there can be only one actual genitor. Cultures develop their own explanations for biological processes, including the role of insemination in the creation and growth of a human embryo.

Through questioning, the ethnographer discovers the specific genealogical relationships between “relatives” and the person who has named them—the ego. Ego means I (or me) in Latin. It’s who you, the reader, are in the kin charts that follow. It’s your perspective looking out on your kin. By posing the same questions to several local people, the ethnographer learns about the extent and direction of kinship calculation in that society. The ethnographer also begins to understand the relationship between kinship calculation and kin groups: how people use kinship to create and maintain personal ties and to join social groups.
Chapter 10  Families, Kinship, and Descent

sister’s son (MZS), mother’s sister’s daughter (MZD), father’s brother’s son (FBS), father’s brother’s daughter (FBD), father’s sister’s son (FZS), and father’s sister’s daughter (FZD). First cousin thus lumps together at least eight genealogical kin types.

Uncle encompasses mother’s and father’s brothers, and aunt includes mother’s and father’s sisters. We also use uncle and aunt for the spouses of our “blood” aunts and uncles. We use the same term for mother’s brother and father’s brother because we perceive them as being the same sort of relative. Calling them uncles, we distinguish between them and another kin type, F, whom we call Father, Dad, or Pop. In many societies, however, it is common to call a father and a father’s brother by the same term. Later we’ll see why.

In the United States and Canada, the nuclear family continues to be the most important group based on kinship. This is true despite an increased incidence of single parenthood, divorce, and remarriage. The nuclear family’s relative isolation from other kin groups in modern nations reflects geographic mobility within an industrial economy with sale of labor for cash.

Genealogical Kin Types and Kin Terms

At this point, we may distinguish between kin terms (the words used for different relatives in a particular language) and genealogical kin types. We designate genealogical kin types with the letters and symbols shown in Figure 10.6. Genealogical kin type refers to an actual genealogical relationship (e.g., father’s brother) as opposed to a kin term (e.g., uncle).

Kin terms reflect the social construction of kinship in a given culture. A kin term may (and usually does) lump together several genealogical relationships. In English, for instance, we use father primarily for one kin type: the genealogical father. However, father can be extended to an adoptive father or stepfather—and even to a priest. Grandfather includes mother’s father and father’s father. The term cousin lumps together several kin types. Even the more specific first cousin includes mother’s brother’s son (MBS), mother’s brother’s daughter (MBD), mother’s sister’s son (MIZ), mother’s sister’s daughter (MID), father’s brother’s son (FBS), father’s brother’s daughter (FBD), father’s sister’s son (FZS), and father’s sister’s daughter (FZD). First cousin thus lumps together at least eight genealogical kin types.

Uncle encompasses mother’s and father’s brothers, and aunt includes mother’s and father’s sisters. We also use uncle and aunt for the spouses of our “blood” aunts and uncles. We use the same term for mother’s brother and father’s brother because we perceive them as being the same sort of relative. Calling them uncles, we distinguish between them and another kin type, F, whom we call Father, Dad, or Pop. In many societies, however, it is common to call a father and a father’s brother by the same term. Later we’ll see why.

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It’s reasonable for North Americans to distinguish between relatives who belong to their nuclear families and those who don’t. We are more likely to grow up with our parents than with our...
appreciating

ANTHROPOLOGY

When Are Two Dads Better than One?—When the Women Are in Charge

Like race, kinship is socially constructed. Cultures develop their own explanations for biological processes, including the role of insemination in the creation and growth of a human embryo. Scientifically informed people know that fertilization of an ovum by a single sperm is responsible for conception. But other cultures, including the Barí and their neighbors, hold different views about procreation. In some societies it is believed that spirits, rather than men, place babies in women’s wombs. In others it is believed that a fetus must be nourished by continuing insemination during pregnancy.

There are cultures, including the Barí and others described here, in which people believe that multiple men can create the same fetus. When a baby is born, the Barí mother names the men she recognizes as fathers, and they help her raise the child. In the United States, having two dads may be the result of divorce, remarriage, stepparenthood, or a same-sex union. In the societies discussed here, multiple (partible) paternity is a common and beneficial social fact.

[Among] the Barí people of Venezuela, . . . multiple paternity is the norm . . . In such societies, children with more than one official father are more likely to survive to adulthood than those with just one Dad . . . The findings have . . . been published in a book, Cultures of Multiple Fathers: The Theory and Practice of Partible Paternity in Lowland South America [Beckerman and Valentine 2002], that questions accepted theories about social organization, the balance of power between the sexes and human evolution.

The Barí of Venezuela believe that a child can have multiple fathers.
that more than one father can contribute to the developing embryo.

The authors have discovered a strong correlation between the status of women in the society and the benefits of multiple paternity. Among the Barí, 80% of children with two or more official dads survive to adulthood, compared with 64% with one father. This contrasts with male-dominated cultures such as the neighboring Curripaco, where children of doubtful parentage are outcast and frequently die young.

Explaining the significance of this discovery, Paul Valentine said: “The conventional view of the male-female bargain is that a man will provide food and shelter for a woman and her children if he can be assured that the children are biologically his. Our research turns this idea on its head. . . . In societies where women control marriages and other aspects of social life, both men and women have multiple partners and spread the responsibilities of child rearing.” It is of course scientifically impossible to have more than one biological father, but aboriginal peoples in South America, Africa and Australasia believe that it takes more than one act of intercourse to make a baby. In some of these societies, nearly all children have multiple fathers. In others, while partible paternity is accepted, socially the child has only one father. However, in the middle are groups where some children do have multiple fathers and some do not. In this case, the children can be compared to see how having more than one father benefits the children—and generational studies show that the children do benefit from the extra care.

When a child is born among the Barí, the mother publicly announces the names of the one or more men she believes to be the fathers, who, if they accept paternity, are expected to provide care for the mother and child. . . . “In small egalitarian societies, women's interests are best served if mate choice is a non-binding, female decision; if a network of multiple females to aid or substitute for a woman in her mothering responsibilities exists; if multiple males support a woman and her children; and if a woman is shielded from the effects of male sexual jealousy.” . . .

In cultures where women choose their mates, women have broad sexual freedom and partible paternity is accepted, women clearly have the upper hand. In Victorian-style societies where women’s sexual activity is controlled by men, marriage is exclusive and male sexual jealousy is a constant threat, men have the upper hand. In between is a full range of combinations and options, all represented in the varying South American cultures.

Robert Carneiro, curator at the American Museum of Natural History, said: “Rarely does a book thrust open a door, giving us a striking new view. It has long been known that . . . peoples around the world believe that one act of sexual intercourse is not enough for a child to be born. Now for the first time we have a volume that deals with the consequences and ramifications of this belief, and it does so in exhaustive and fascinating detail.” . . .


KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY

People perceive and define kin relations differently in different cultures. In any culture, kinship terminology is a classification system, a taxonomy or typology. It is a native taxonomy, developed over generations by the people who live in a particular society. A native classification system is based on how people perceive similarities and differences in the things being classified.

However, anthropologists have discovered that there are a limited number of patterns in which people classify their kin. People who speak very different languages may use exactly the same system of kinship terminology. This section examines the four main ways of classifying kin on the parental generation: lineal, bifurcate merging, generational, and bifurcate collateral. We also consider the social correlates of these classification systems. (Note that each of the systems described here applies to the parental generation. There are also differences in kin terminology on ego’s generation. These systems involve the classification of siblings and cousins. There are six such systems, called Eskimo, Iroquois, Hawaiian, Crow, Omaha, and Sudanese cousin terminology, after societies that traditionally used them. You can see them diagrammed and discussed at the following websites: http://anthro.palomar.edu/kinship/kinship_5.htm; http://anthro.palomar.edu/kinship/kinship_6.htm; http://www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/anthropology/tutor/kinterms/termsys.html.)

A functional explanation will be offered for each system of kinship terminology, such as lineal, bifurcate merging, and generational terminology. Functional explanations attempt to relate particular customs (such as the use of kin terms)
Kinship terms provide useful information about social patterns. If two relatives are designated by the same term, we can assume that they are perceived as sharing socially significant attributes. Several factors influence the way people interact with, perceive, and classify relatives. For instance, do certain kinds of relatives customarily live together or apart? How far apart? What benefits do they derive from each other, and what are their obligations? Are they members of the same descent group or of different descent groups? With these questions in mind, let’s examine systems of kinship terminology.

**Lineal Terminology**

Our own system of kinship classification is called the *lineal system* (Figure 10.7). The number 3 and the color light blue stand for the term “uncle,” which we apply both to FB and to MB. Lineal kinship terminology is found in societies such as the United States and Canada in which the nuclear family is the most important group based on kinship.

Lineal kinship terminology has absolutely nothing to do with lineages, which are found in very different social contexts. (What contexts are those?) Lineal kinship terminology gets its name from the fact that it distinguishes lineal relatives from collateral relatives. What does that mean? A lineal relative is an ancestor or descendant, anyone on the direct line of descent that leads to and from ego (Figure 10.8). Thus, lineal relatives are one’s parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and other direct forebears. Lineal relatives also include children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Collateral relatives are all other kin. They include siblings, nieces and nephews, aunts and uncles, and cousins (Figure 10.8). Affinals are relatives by marriage, whether of lineals (e.g., son’s wife) or of collaterals (sister’s husband). 

**Bifurcate Merging Terminology**

Bifurcate merging kinship terminology (Figure 10.9) bifurcates, or splits, the mother’s side and the father’s side. But it also merges same-sex siblings of each parent. Thus, mother and mother’s sister are merged under the same term (1), while father and father’s brother also get a common term (2). There are different terms for mother’s brother (3) and father’s sister (4).

People use this system in societies with unilinear (patrilineal and matrilineal) descent rules and unilocal (patrilocal and matrilocal) postmarital residence rules. When the society is unilinear and unilocal, the logic of bifurcate merging terminology is fairly clear. In a patrilineal society, for example, father and father’s brother belong to the same descent group, gender, and generation. Since patrilineal societies usually have patrilocal descent systems, the terms for collateral relatives are simplified. For instance, the term “uncle” is used for both paternal and maternal uncles, and “aunt” for both paternal and maternal aunts. The terms for affinals are also simplified, with terms for relatives by marriage dividing into two categories: those who are related by the father’s side and those who are related by the mother’s side.
Generational Terminology

Like bifurcate merging kinship terminology, **generational kinship terminology** uses the same term for parents and their siblings, but the lumping is more complete (Figure 10.10). With generational terminology, there are only two terms for the parental generation. We may translate them as “father” and “mother,” but more accurate translations would be “male member of the parental generation” and “female member of the parental generation.”

Generational kinship terminology does not distinguish between the mother’s and father’s sides. It does not bifurcate, but it certainly does merge. It uses just one term for father, father’s brother, and mother’s brother. In a unilineal society, these three kin types would never belong to the same descent group. Generational kinship terminology also uses a single term for mother, mother’s sister, and father’s sister. Nor, in a unilineal society, would these three ever be members of the same group.

Nevertheless, generational terminology suggests closeness between ego and his or her aunts and uncles—much more closeness than exists between Americans and these kin types. How likely would you be to call your uncle “Dad” or your aunt “Mom”? We’d expect to find generational terminology in cultures in which kinship is much more important than it is in our own but in which there is no rigid distinction between the father’s side and the mother’s side.

It’s logical, then, that generational kin terminology is typical of societies with ambilineal descent. In such contexts, descent-group membership is not automatic. People may choose the group they join, change their descent-group membership, or belong to two or more descent groups simultaneously. Generational terminology fits these conditions. The use of intimate kin terms signals that people have close personal relations with all their relatives of the parental generation. People exhibit similar behavior toward their uncles, aunts, and parents. Someday they’ll have to choose a descent group to join. Furthermore, in ambilineal societies, postmarital residence is usually ambilocal. This means that the married couple can live with either the husband’s or the wife’s group.

Significantly, generational terminology also characterizes certain foraging bands, including Kalahari San groups and several native societies of North America. Use of this terminology reflects certain similarities between foraging bands and ambilineal descent groups. In both societies, people have a choice about their kin-group affiliation. Foragers always live with kin, but they often shift band affiliation and so may be members of several different bands during their lifetimes. Just as in food-producing societies with ambilineal descent, generational terminology among foragers helps maintain close personal relationships with several parental-generation relatives whom ego may eventually use as a point of entry into different groups. Recap 10.1 lists the types of kin group, the postmarital residence rule, and the economy associated with the four types of kinship terminology.

**FIGURE 10.10** Generational Kinship Terminology.

Bifurcate Collateral Terminology

Of the four kin classification systems, **bifurcate collateral kinship terminology** is the most specific. It has separate terms for each of the six kin terms: M, F, MB, MZ, FB, and FZ.
PART 2 Appreciating Cultural Diversity

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RECAP 10.1 The Four Systems of Kinship Terminology, with Their Social and Economic Correlates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY</th>
<th>KIN GROUP</th>
<th>RESIDENCE RULE</th>
<th>ECONOMY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lineal</td>
<td>Nuclear family</td>
<td>Neolocal</td>
<td>Industrialism, foraging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bifurcate merging</td>
<td>Unilinear descent group—patrilineal or matrilineal</td>
<td>Unilocal—patriloc al or matriloc al</td>
<td>Horticulture, pastoralism, agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generational</td>
<td>Ambilineal descent group, band</td>
<td>Ambilocal</td>
<td>Agriculture, horticulture, foraging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bifurcate collateral</td>
<td>Varies</td>
<td>Varies</td>
<td>Varies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

types of the parental generation (Figure 10.11). Bifurcate collateral terminology isn’t as common as the other types. Many of the societies that use it are in North Africa and the Middle East, and many of them are offshoots of the same ancestral group.

Bifurcate collateral terminology also may be used when a child has parents of different ethnic backgrounds and uses terms for aunts and uncles derived from different languages. Thus, if you have a mother who is Latina and a father who is Anglo, you may call your aunts and uncles on your mother’s side “tía” and “tío,” while calling those on your father’s side “aunt” and “uncle.” And your mother and father may be “Mom” and “Pop.” That’s a modern form of bifurcate collateral kinship terminology.

Acing the COURSE

Summary

1. In nonindustrial societies, kinship, descent, and marriage organize social and political life. In studying kinship, we must distinguish between kin groups, whose composition and activities can be observed, and kinship calculation—how people identify and designate their relatives.

2. One widespread kin group is the nuclear family, consisting of a married couple and their children. There are functional alternatives to the nuclear family. That is, other groups may assume functions usually associated with the nuclear family. Nuclear families tend to be especially important in foraging and industrial societies. Among farmers and herders, other kinds of kin groups often overshadow the nuclear family.

3. In contemporary North America, the nuclear family is the characteristic kin group for the middle class. Expanded households and sharing with extended family kin occur more frequently among the poor, who may pool their resources in dealing with poverty. Today, however, even in the American middle class, nuclear family households are declining as single-person households and other domestic arrangements increase.

4. The descent group is a basic kin group among nonindustrial food producers (farmers and herders). Unlike families, descent groups have perpetuity—they last for generations. Descent-group members share and manage a common estate: land, animals, and other resources. There are several kinds of descent groups. Lineages are based on demonstrated descent; clans, on stipulated descent. Descent rules may be unilinear or ambilineal. Unilinear (patrilineal and matrilineal) descent is associated with...
unilocal (respectively, patrilocal and matrilocal) postmarital residence. Obligations to one’s descent group and to one’s family of procreation may conflict, especially in matrilineal societies.

5. A kinship terminology is a classification of relatives based on perceived differences and similarities. Comparative research has revealed a limited number of ways of classifying kin. Because there are correlations between kinship terminology and other social practices, we often can predict kinship terminology from other aspects of culture. The four basic kinship terminologies for the parental generation are lineal, bifurcate merging, generational, and bifurcate collateral. Many foraging and industrial societies use lineal terminology, which is associated with nuclear family organization. Cultures with unilocal residence and unilineal descent tend to have bifurcate merging terminology. Generational terminology correlates with ambilineal descent and ambilocal residence.

Key Terms
affinals 254
ambilineal 249
bifurcate collateral kinship terminology 255
bifurcate merging kinship terminology 254
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MULTIPLE CHOICE
1. Why is a focus on the nuclear family characteristic of many modern nations? Because
a. the nuclear family is the most common family arrangement in industrialized societies.
b. isolation from the extended family arises from geographic mobility that is characteristic of many industrialized societies.
c. modernity is associated with smaller and more exclusive households, especially among the urban poor.
d. higher incomes have made it possible for most adults to achieve the American cultural ideal of a nuclear family.
e. the nuclear family is the most developed form of domestic arrangement.

2. The nuclear family is the most common kin group in what kinds of societies?
a. tribal societies and chiefdoms
b. ambilineal and collateral
c. lineages and clans
d. industrial middle class and foraging bands
e. patrilocal and matrilocal

3. Which of the following statements about the nuclear family is not true?
a. The nuclear family is a cultural universal.
b. In the United States, nuclear families accounted for just 22.5 percent of households in 2007.
c. A family of orientation may be a nuclear family.
d. A family of procreation may be a nuclear family.
e. Most people belong to at least two nuclear families during their lives.

4. In kinship analysis, what does the classification of descent group as either lineages or clans indicate?
a. A lineage uses demonstrated descent while clans use stipulated descent.
b. Descent is always achieved.
c. How individuals define and think about relationships of descent is culturally universal.
d. Only in lineages do members descend from an apical ancestor.
e. Members of lineages do not like to rely on their memory to know who their ancestors are.

5. Like race, kinship is culturally constructed. This means that
a. the educational system is failing to educate people about real, biologically based human relations.
b. like race, kinship is a fiction, with no real social consequence.
c. it is a phenomenon separated from other real aspects of society, such as economics and politics.
d. studies of kinship tell us little about people’s actual experiences.
e. people perceive and define kin relations differently in different cultures, although anthropologists have discovered a limited number of patterns in which people classify their kin.

6. Anthropologists are interested in kinship calculation,
a. but only if it has any consequence in changing demographics over a 10-year period.
b. the ways people evaluate the worth of the work of anthropologists.
c. and then they do their best to impose their etic perspective on people’s emic views.
d. the ways people apply mathematical principles to determine degrees of relatedness with the ancestors of anatomically modern humans.
e. the system by which people in a society reckon kin relationships.

7. In any culture, kinship terminology is a classification system, a taxonomy or typology. More generally, a taxonomic system
a. is only accurate when based on Western science.
b. is based on how people perceive similarities and differences in the things being classified.
c. only makes any sense to those who study it for years.
d. usually changes with every generation.
e. applies best to nonliving things.

8. What is another name for a person’s “in-laws”?
a. family of orientation
b. merging relatives
c. affinals
d. collaterals
e. lineals

9. In this chapter, a functional explanation is offered for various systems of kinship terminology. What does a functional explanation suggest about a system of kinship terminology?
a. Kinship terminology only becomes a system when it functions properly.
b. Certain kinship terms are what cause certain patterns of behavior.
c. A functional explanation accurately predicts what types of kinship terminology will develop in future generations if enough data about the system are collected.
d. A functional explanation attempts to correlate particular customs (in this case kinship terms) to other features of society.
e. A functional explanation distinguishes genealogical kin types from kin terms.

10. In a bifurcate merging kinship terminology, which of the following pairs would be called by the same term?
a. MZ and MB
b. M and MZ
c. MF and FF
d. M and F
e. MB and FB

FILL IN THE BLANK
1. The family of ________ is the name of the family in which a child is raised, while the family of ________ is the name of the family established when one marries and has children.

2. ________ refers to the postmarital residence pattern in which the married couple is expected to establish its own home.

3. A ________ refers to a unilineal descent group whose members demonstrate their common descent from an apical ancestor.

4. In ________ kinship calculation, kin ties are traced equally through males and females.

5. In a bifurcate merging kinship terminology, ________ and ________ relatives are merged.

CRITICAL THINKING
1. Why is kinship so important to anthropologists? How might the study of kinship be useful for research in fields of anthropology other than cultural anthropology?

2. What are some examples of alternatives to nuclear family arrangements considered in this chapter? What may be the impact of new (and increasingly accessible) reproductive technologies on domestic arrangements?

3. Although the nuclear family remains the cultural ideal for many Americans, other domestic arrangements now outnumber the “traditional” American household more than four to one. What are some reasons for this? Do you think this trend is good or bad? Why?

4. To what sorts of family or families do you belong? Have you belonged to other kinds of families? How do the kin terms you use compare with the four classification systems discussed in this chapter?

5. Cultures with unilocal residence and unilineal descent tend to have bifurcate merging terminology, while ambilocal descent and ambilocal residence correlate with generational terminology. Why does this make sense? What are some examples of each case?
Carsten, J.  

Hansen, K. V.  

Parkin, R., and L. Stone, eds.  

Stacey, J.  

Stone, L.  

Willie, C. V., and R. J. Reddick  

Go to our Online Learning Center website at [www.mhhe.com/kottak](http://www.mhhe.com/kottak) for Internet exercises directly related to the content of this chapter.
How is marriage defined and regulated, and what rights does it convey?

What role does marriage play in creating and maintaining group alliances?

What forms of marriage exist cross-culturally, and what are their social correlates?
Marriage