Marriage, Love, and Incest
Anthropology 2240, Weeks 5-6

- Outline -

Marriage
Definitions
A universal?
Same Sex Marriages
Love
Film: World Without Fathers or Husbands

Incest Taboo
Definitions
Explanations
Selection of Anthropology Text Book Definitions of Marriage

Current Anthropology 1100 Textbook:

- ‘… a socially approved sexual and economic union between a man and a woman. It is presumed, by both the couple and by others, to be more or less permanent, and it subsumes reciprocal rights and obligations between the two spouses and between spouses and their future children’ (Ember and Ember).

Others:

- ‘publicly recognized sexual partnership between two people, usually male and female, that allows for the creation of socially legitimate children’ (Klein)

- ‘An intimate relation between spouses which creates in-law kin relations’ (Miller, Esterik, and Esterik).

- ‘A series of customs formalizing the relationship between male and female adults within the family. Marriage is a socially approved union between a man and a women that regulates the sexual and economic rights and obligations between them. Marriage usually involves an explicit contract or understanding that is entered into with the assumption that it will be permanent’ (Ferraro).

- ‘If we take what Euro-Americans call marriage as a prototype of a particular kind of social relationship, we discover in all societies institutions that resemble what people in the United States would call marriage … we tend to classify [a range of practices as marriage] because of the key elements they do have in common. On these grounds, a prototypical marriage involves a man and a woman, transforms the status of the man and the woman, and stipulates the degree of sexual access the married partners may have to each other’ (Lavenda and Schultz).

- ‘A relationship between one or more men (male or female) and one or more women (female or male) recognized by society as having continuing claim to the right of sexual access to one another’ (Haviland, Fedorak, Crawford, and Lee).
**Film: ‘A World without Fathers or Husbands’**

**Definitions**

- Matriarchy – women with political authority and power; community and family decision making rests with women.
- Matrilineal – a system of creating descent groups (blood relatives) by tracing membership through your mother and her family line.
- Matrilocal – Families form in the home of the mother/wife’s family or mother’s mother’s family. Often, husbands move to the homes of their wives.

**Background**

- Group is the Mosuo (pronounced Mo-zo) who live in southwestern China near the Tibet border. They live in the area of Sichuan and Yunnan provinces.
- They are matrilineal, matriarchal, and matrilocal.
- They are reported not to have marriages or fatherly relationships between men and biological children.
- Film shows dramatically the cultural basis for incest.
- Film shows dramatically the relationship between siblings in matrilineal societies.
- Film is about women with high status. Is this strange in the world?

**Questions**

- What does marriage do for individuals and the group?
- Isn’t sexual relationships the primary focus of partnerships here? If so, how are families formed?
- Are there truly no marriages here? No father-figures in the lives of children? No social benefits of marriage?
- Does the film create new stereotypes about men and women (ie different from the ones we’ve already discussed)?
- Why are there taboos around ‘furtive visits’?
- Is the women’s role here a result of a particular economic system?
- What do men do? (Besides nothing!)