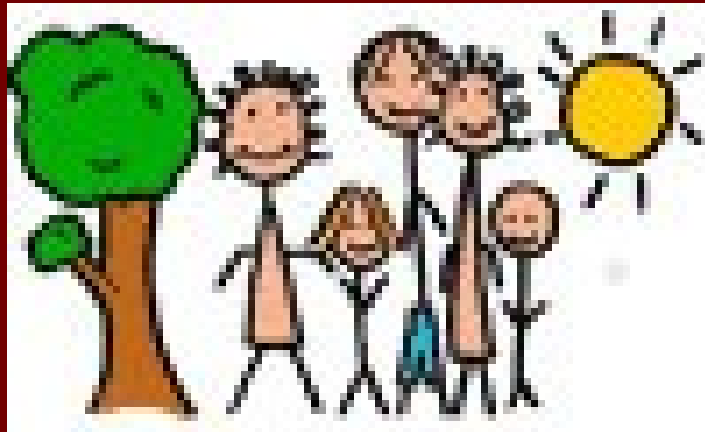


Defining Family



Family: History of the Definition

- Before the 17th century in Europe: no term for people related by blood or marriage and sharing residence
- Comes from the Latin word *familia* = household and *famulus* = servant
- Family included the master of the household (*pater familias*), his servants, and his descendants
- The wife of the *pater familias* could be either a part of her husband's family or part of her birth family (marriage *in manu* or *sine manu*)
- In the late 17th century, "family" began to denote parents and their children
- Only applied to units in European society

Family Definitions in Anthropology

- Evolutionary approach (19th century)
- “Primitives” are sexually promiscuous → incapable of having families because children would not recognize their fathers
- Evolution from chaotic “female society” to orderly “male society”

Family Definitions in Anthropology

- Bronisław Malinowski (1884-1942), Polish anthropologist, declared family universal
- He distinguished issues of sexual activity from family and proved that Australian aborigines had marriage:
 - They had rules regulating sexual activity during sexual orgies
 - They differentiated between legal marriages and casual unions
 - Each child had a recognized father

Family Definitions in Anthropology

- Malinowski's definition:
- 1) a bounded set of people (a mother, a father, and children) who recognize each other and are distinguishable from other groups
- 2) a definite physical space, a hearth and a home
- 3) a particular set of emotions, family love
- Later, anthropologists challenged Malinowski's idea that family always includes fathers, but they kept other aspects of his definition → the basic unit is mother+child

Family Definitions in Anthropology

- Feminist anthropologists:
- True, it's possible to find mother+child or couple+children units in every society, but not all such units exhibit Malinowski's three features
- 1) Boundaries: Natives might not be interested in boundaries; no words to identify the unit of parents and children, e.g., Zinacantecos of southern Mexico
- 2) Place: Some families lack places – parents and children don't eat and sleep together, e.g., Mundurucu of tropical South America
- 3) Love: People do not necessarily expect family members to love one another, e.g., Cheyenne Indians

Family Definitions in Anthropology

- Science is influenced by historical context
- Evolutionary approach emerged in the 19th century when a lot was changing → they understood that family is not unchanging, but interpreted those changes as “progress”
- But they were correct that modern Western family is something that only emerges in modern Western society
- Malinowski and many other anthropologists believed that family is universal – stems from a belief in the universal nurturant and reproductive role of women
- The family as we know is a cultural construct
- We need to listen to how people themselves view their relationships with others

Family Decline vs. Family Transformation

- Definition of the family plays a central role in this debate
- Family Decline: Structural and structural-functional definitions
- Family Transformation: Functional and postmodern definitions

Structural Definition

- Focuses on family structure
- Argues that family structure should be nuclear: a husband, a wife, and children
- Other family structures are not as good
- But Popenoe offers the following definition: “Domestic group consisting of at least one adult and one dependent”

Structural-Functional Definition

Functions of the Family:

- Work and production, economic cooperation
- Government
- Sexual regulation
- Regulation of procreation
- Childrearing and socialization of children – instilling values
- Education of children
- Source of emotional security – care, affection, companionship

Structural-Functional Definition

- Historically, there had been some structural loss (breakdown of extended family), and functions have been reduced
- But the recent decline is different – “nuclear” family is breaking up
- Nuclear family should perform two functions: childrearing and provision of affection and companionship
- Loss of these functions=erosion of family’s importance as a social institution
- This loss of functions is attributed to the changes in family structure

Functional Definition

- Cowan: What matters is not family structure or number of functions, but how well those functions are performed
- The families are changing rather than declining -- contemporary families perform functions of childrearing and provision of affection just as well as they were earlier
- Whatever problems we see in childrearing are not due to family structure, but due to other processes in society (or at least causality is not established)
- We should not be concerned who performs the two functions, but how well they are performed, and how we can facilitate their performance

Postmodern Definition

- Stacey: Family is an ideological, symbolic construct – family is changes over time and is subject to political processes
- We can never talk about family decline, only transformation – currently, family forms become more diverse and complex
- We should be concerned not with family decline but with problems in childrearing -- improve the lives of children rather than insist that they are raised within a specific family structure
- We need to support families' functioning rather than try to restructure them

Contemporary Definitions: U.S. Census Bureau

“A family consists of two or more people, one of whom is the householder, related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing in the same housing unit. A household consists of all people who occupy a housing unit regardless of relationship. A household may consist of a person living alone or multiple unrelated individuals or families living together”

Contemporary Definitions: Wikipedia

From <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>:

“A family consists of a domestic group of people (or a number of domestic groups), typically affiliated by birth or marriage, or by analogous or comparable relationships — including domestic partnership, cohabitation, adoption, surname and (in some cases) ownership (as occurred in the Roman Empire).”

Contemporary Definitions: Employer Policies

“...an employee’s spouse and dependent, unmarried children under age 19 (age 23 or 25 if a full-time student and dependent upon the employee for support)” (Abbott, 2002)

Contemporary Definitions: Family Scholars

- “Ultimately, I define ‘family’ as the smallest, organized, durable network of kin and non-kin who interact daily, providing domestic needs of children and assuring their survival” (Stack, 1996)
- “We define family as any group of people related either biologically, emotionally, or legally. That is, the group of people that the patient defines as significant for his or her well-being” (McDaniel et al., 2005)
- “Family = Network of Mutual Commitment” (National Institute of Mental Health, 2005)

Your Definitions

- A group of people (related or unrelated) who are dependent on one another, support each other, and love each other unconditionally.
- A group of people who share a bond and are connected through a web of experiences, values, emotions, and a fostered culture. This unit does not necessarily have to be tied together biologically, but instead through their common socializations.
- A fluid group of people, tied together by more than common necessity or the desire to achieve a specific goal, who create a support system of unconditional love for one another.
- A group of people who are economically and socially dependent on one another, influence each others' ideas and values, and depend on one another for unconditional love and support.
- Family consists of a framework of people that provide love and support, either biological or not.
- A constantly changing group of individuals brought together by blood or connection, who affect one another on a personal level.



Defining Family

- No single “objective” definition
- The family is an ideal and a contested terrain
- Typical definitions are based on:
 - Law
 - Biology
 - Nurturance



Law

- Two or more persons related by blood, marriage, common-law marriage, or adoption

Biology

- Very specific kind of biological definition: “blood” = genetic ties
- It originates from a patrilineal system (the lineage is determined through the father), that emphasized male seed
- That definition was extended – both women and men provide “seeds” – but still, we focus on genetic ties; children are “half hers, half his”
- This is different from a matrilineal system – values motherhood per se, i.e., the experience of pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, etc.
- In our system, women’s rights to the child are not their rights as mothers, but as “father equivalents”
- This contradiction is most evident in cases of surrogate mothering – e.g., Baby M case

Genetic Ties vs Social Relationships

- The closest genetic tie a human being can have – identical twin
- Next closest -- ties between parents and children and between full siblings. Sister=mother in terms of genes.
- Half-siblings have the same connection as grandparents and grandchildren – 25% connection, cousins – 12.5%
- But parenthood is not just a genetic tie -- social relationship matters
- Parent-child relationship is invested with social and legal rights that are not recognized in our society in any other genetic relationship

Love and Nurturance

- Many Americans today define family by love and nurturance



Friends are the family
we choose.

Love and Nurturance

- This is a recent development – nurturance came to the center of this definition in the 20th century
- Corresponds to Public (Market) vs Private (Family) division
- But why do we assume that people get nurtured in the family? Some families are nurturant, some are not (abuse, neglect)
- Still, we try to map nurturance to specific kind of ties (blood, marriage, or adoption) and ignore other nurturance and love as non-family

Do we have a choice of family?

- Even though we view family as private business, it is not – it is very much public
- We have a choice (AGENCY) but that choice is constrained by social forces (STRUCTURE) as well as cultural norms (CULTURE)

Why define family?

- Policies and legal cases:
 - Housing benefits
 - Health insurance benefits
 - U.S. immigration system
 - Custody cases, e.g., *Alison D. v. Virginia M.*
- Formal legal definition of a family (blood, marriage or adoption) collides with a functional definition of the family (based on nurturance and love)
- Moral debate: debate about family values – family definition is in the center