VARieties
OF MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS

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Intimacy within marriage is an important value in America today, where love is viewed as the proper reason for marriage, and where some see it as a justification for sex without marriage. Popular songs and television programs glorify love and intimacy, and dwell on the problems of lost love and jealousy. In recent decades, more Americans are viewing the achievement of intimacy and love as a basic goal. How do other societies deal with romantic love and intimacy? In this chapter we will look at cultural variation in marrying for love, in intimacy and aloofness in marriage, and in jealousy, violence, fear of sex, and divorce. We will see that America and a few other societies are somewhat peculiar in their extreme emphasis on romantic love and marital intimacy.

**ROMANTIC LOVE**

Is Romantic Love Universal?

In everyday language we talk about the “chemistry” of love. Some scholars believe there is an inner chemical basis creating the infatuation and giddiness of new love. In the right situation, they believe, our bodies release phenylethylamine (a chemical similar to amphetamine), which may produce these love symptoms. A chemical basis means that love is possible in all cultures, but it need not be defined in the same way everywhere. For example, the idea of courtly love (whence we get our word courtship) in Europe during the middle ages was not the basis for marriage as it is today. Courtly love was conceived as pure, spiritual, and asexual, in contrast to earthly love. It was not considered a proper basis for sex or marriage, but was often adulterous.

For several decades, scholars have remarked on the seeming universality of romantic love as well as the restrictions that many societies place on love. Indeed, a cross-cultural study finds that romantic love is mentioned as an idea or a practice in about nine-tenths of a large sample of societies surveyed. While many cultures restrict romantic love, in almost every culture some people fall in love despite severe negative sanctions. In North India, for example, romantic love is discouraged. People believe that love-based marriage brings shame on the couple, for others will see such a marriage with “bad eyes”; they believe that these marriages inevitably fail.
Romantic Love as a Basis for Marriage

In what kind of society is romantic love a basis for marriage? Romantic love in mate selection tends to occur with free choice in mate selection, independent nuclear families, and little division of labor between spouses.

When romantic love is the basis for marrying, you would expect a society to allow some freedom to try out relationships. One common feature of this freedom is public dances, which can be excellent mechanisms for starting relationships and romance. Although it may seem paradoxical, freedom of choice is also associated with more premarital antagonism and violence. Why? This may be due to sexual jealousy in romantic love, or to violence in courtship practices, or simply more opportunity for antagonism with individual courtship.

The Trobriand Islanders of the South Pacific show how love and free choice fit together with dances and violence. This society allows adolescents even more sexual and courtship freedom than modern western youth have. Sex play begins long before adolescence, but romantic attraction becomes more serious after puberty when stronger possessive attachments begin to grow. At harvest time each year there is a month of festivities and dances. Young islanders dress in their best festive clothes and take gifts to other villages where they may attend dances. These dances offer fine opportunities for a young person to make new acquaintances and find new romance in another village. Sometimes jealousy erupts and leads to violence as lovers shift partners or when triangles develop, but this seems to be mostly male against male violence. As a couple pairs off into a steady relationship, they cohabit in the bachelor’s house in the center of the boy’s village. If their relationship develops further they may decide to marry, although the approval of the woman’s parents is needed for marriage.

Cross-cultural studies on the link of romantic love to family structure present a puzzle. Earlier research suggests that romantic love in mate selection is less likely in societies with neolocal residence (where couples live apart from kin). However, recent research finds that romantic love in mate selection is not consistently related to marital residence, but does tend to occur in societies with independent nuclear families. Two ways of resolving this disparity in findings are apparent. Possibly there are differences in the measurement of love-based mate selection between the
studies, or perhaps romantic love is more likely in societies where families are nuclear but not neolocal, that is, where couples live near, but not with kin. The Trobriand Islanders’ love-based marriage fits the second point of view. Trobriand Island couples build their own homes in the husband’s maternal uncle’s village.

Perhaps restrictions on youth’s romantic choices are useful in societies with extended families, for in-marrying spouses need to be blended into the existing larger family group. There one rubs elbows with in-laws daily. Restrictions on mate selection may result in the selection of partners who are more compatible not just with the spouse, but with the larger extended family group.

How is marrying for love related to work roles? One study reports that romantic love based marriage is more likely when spouses are more economically independent. Imbalance in men’s and women’s food production work is used to measure dependence. If either women or men produce the bulk of the food consumed, the spouses’ mutual dependence is considered to be greater. Why have romantic love with economic independence? Some societies may use romantic love to hold marriages together in the absence of strong economic need.\textsuperscript{10}

Perhaps, though, we should be cautious in interpreting a sharp division of labor as a kind of mutual dependence. Some believe that imbalanced food production roles create a “producer” and a “consumer” in marriage, with only the consumer being dependent and the producer having power. Others believe dependence and power involve not work, but control of the property and tools used in production or the control of food or other goods produced for market outside the home.\textsuperscript{11} There may be some underlying factor other than mutual dependence linking romantic love to the work roles of spouses.

Romantic love in mate choice also occurs more in societies with prolonged frustration of childhood needs. Children’s needs are frustrated by severe punishment or by abrupt transitions, such as in weaning or toilet training. The psychoanalytic theory of personality holds that we become fixated on needs that are frustrated early in life. Love-based marriage thus may be a cultural spin-off from these fixations—a quest for missing fulfillment.\textsuperscript{12}

The idea of love being grounded in frustration will sound off-base to Americans who believe the capacity for love is built in warm, secure relations early in life. Americans, however, do not commonly carry infants about most of each day nor do they have a great deal of skin-to-skin contact. The ideal of privacy leads us to have separate
bedrooms for children and parents. Consequently, we may be producing a degree of frustration rather than the security we hope for in our children. The American view also concerns lasting intimacy, not passionate, romantic love at the start of marriage. Nonetheless, other research reports no cross-cultural correlation between child-rearing indulgence and marital intimacy.\textsuperscript{13} Further research may better resolve the question of how traits instilled during child-rearing are linked to romance in mate selection.

\textbf{INTIMACY AND ALOOFNESS WITHIN MARRIAGE}

Another issue of cross-cultural study is the question of why marriage in some societies is an aloof, or segregated, relationship while it is more intimate in others. Middle-class Americans often value intimacy in marriage so highly that they feel such intimacy is natural. From this value comes a feeling that the emotional aloofness and segregated roles of some husbands and wives in the poorer classes are a problem.\textsuperscript{14} However, some preindustrial societies value aloof marriage and practice it to an extreme. One example is the Rajputs of Khalapur in northern India. Their dwellings are constructed with separate quarters for women and men. A wife’s daily life is centered in the courtyard and women’s rooms, where she sleeps, cooks, eats, and cares for children. Her husband spends his leisure time with kinsmen and friends in the men’s quarters of the home, and also sleeps there. In these aloof marriages, husbands are not close companions of their wives and children. Spouses rarely talk together, and a wife takes pride in remaining veiled so that her husband does not see her face even during sexual intercourse. On the other hand, mother-child bonds may be very close. This aloofness has changed somewhat in recent decades, but is still visible in Rajput homes.\textsuperscript{15}

\textbf{Marital Aloofness and Intimacy Theory}

John and Beatrice Whiting lay out a theory of marital aloofness that has guided research and theorizing for two decades.\textsuperscript{16} Let us first look at their theory of aloofness and intimacy, and then
review the research evidence on it. The theory identifies environmental factors that separate men from their families and make them aloof. The theory then traces the effects on sons of growing up with an aloof father. These effects tend to reinforce aloofness in the son’s marriage.

The prime environmental factor in the Whitings’ theory is the need for warriors, particularly among societies at middle levels of complexity. These societies invest heavily in food production resources (cattle herds, crops, and storage facilities). If men in these societies need to be on guard duty often, they may sleep and eat separately from their families. Frequent separation tends to make men aloof in their relationships with their wives and children, while mothers may be thrown into more constant contact with children.

The aloof marriage shapes the personality development of the son because the father is initially distant and weak in the son’s eyes. In contrast the son sees his mother as nurturing and powerful. The Whitings believe that children will identify with the parent believed to have more control. Hence, a boy, they think, will form an initial identification with his mother, when marriage is aloof. Later, as a boy realizes that men hold power outside the home, he begins to consciously identify with his father while his feminine identity continues unconsciously. Through this complex of relationships, aloof marriage may produce hypermasculinity in sons, a condition in which males exaggerate their masculinity as a way of dealing with this conflict in sexual identity. Hypermasculine males are likely to be more aggressive and warlike, and they place a value on military glory. In sum, Whiting and Whiting see hypermasculinity as the son’s protest against the continuing feminine elements in his personality. Aloofness theory does not say that parents consciously train little boys to be sentinels and warriors. The boy’s personality is seen as an unintended by-product of marital aloofness, one that reinforces aloofness in the next generation, for as men they continue to denigrate femininity and to be afraid of too much contact with women, preferring the company of men.

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Research on Aloofness and Intimacy Theory

Whiting and Whiting test their theory, but instead of measuring the social aloofness of men in a holistic way, they primarily look to see how one aspect, sleeping arrangements, relates to environ-
mental and psychological factors. They do show that separate sleeping arrangements are associated with other aspects of aloofness such as separate eating, separate leisure, and men’s absence from the scene of childbirth. Separate sleeping rooms for husband and wife are associated with these environmental factors:

Herding, horticultural and agricultural subsistence: These subsistence systems involve accumulated resources that may need guarding, compared to hunting and gathering.

Cultural complexity: Sleeping apart is more likely with middle levels of complexity.

Polygynous marriage: Each wife in a polygynous family often has a separate hut or room.

Men’s houses: Some groups have a special house for men in each community where women are forbidden. Men may often sleep and spend much of their time there.

Tropical climate, with permanent dwellings and sedentary communities: With these factors, building extra sleeping rooms is less costly than for nomads and others.

Whiting and Whiting present indirect evidence of the link between marital aloofness and hypermasculinity. They note that polygyny (a correlate of separate sleeping) is linked to a value on military glory, and that the level of personal crime (murder, assault, and witchcraft) is higher with mother-child households.

Intimacy and aloofness theory is influential, but follow-up research has yielded mixed returns. Research does show a cross-cultural dimension of intimacy and aloofness in marriage. Marital sleeping, eating, leisure, and birthing patterns (along with men’s houses) do form a tightly correlated cluster of elements. However, social intimacy in marriage is not related to sexual intimacy as seen by the cultural desirability of frequent sex and the lack of segregation and restriction of women during menstruation.17

Researchers are retesting the link of marital aloofness with environmental factors, giving qualified support to the theory. On the positive side, recent research shows aloof marriage to be more likely when the subsistence system is one in which resources are accumulated.18 However, Gwen Broude uses a broader measure of social aloofness and intimacy in marriage based not only on sleeping together or apart, but also on eating, leisure, and birth practices. She raises two challenges to the theory. First, she suggests that marriage is intimate where social support networks are
weak. She finds aloofness in marriage to be unrelated to polygynous marriage or to exclusive mother-child sleeping arrangements, as earlier research suggested. Instead, marital intimacy occurs more frequently in nomadic societies where communities have shifting membership. Marital intimacy is also more likely when communities are not kin-based. If each community is affiliated with a certain kin group and if one must be a member or in-law of that kin group to legitimately live in that community, aloof marriage is more likely. Broude concludes from these results that marriage is more likely to be intimate where the local community does not provide “roots” and social support. If the community provides intimate supportive relations, there is no need for these to be sought in marriage.19

A strength of Broude’s interpretation is that it ties in with findings of social network research. Loose-knit networks, which are more common among people changing communities, do make people feel somewhat rootless and isolated.20 Research in Britain shows that marital role-sharing is more likely when husband and wife share one loose-knit social network, rather than each having their own close-knit network of friends and kin.21 Since working-class spouses tend to have separate close-knit networks, this interpretation also helps to understand why American working class marriage today tends to be a bit more emotionally distant than middle class marriage.22

Broude’s “rootlessness” interpretation of marital intimacy is actually based on findings similar to some of those of Whiting and Whiting. Remember that the Whitings found separate sleeping more likely in sedentary societies, and in societies in the middle ranges of cultural complexity (which are likely to have the kin-based communities emphasized by Broude). The open question is on interpretation: Is it the need for warriors or is it healthy support networks outside the family that underlie marital aloofness?

Broude also questions whether hypermasculinity is an unintended by-product of aloof marriage. She believes instead that it is a result of overt aggression training of boys. She finds, contrary to the theory, that marital aloofness indicators are not much related to hypermasculinity, men’s militarism, and men’s fear of sex and fear of women.23 She further finds that hypermasculinity is linked to overt aggression training, even when fathers are available to offspring. Other research confirms that marital aloofness is related to boys’ aggression training. It is difficult to sepa-
rate the effects of aggression training and aloofness, because this training tends to occur along with aloofness in marriage and in fathering. Broude concludes that hypermasculinity is more a result of overt aggression training than a by-product of marital aloofness.

Marital aloofness research has answered many questions and raised a few in the process. While challenges have been raised, there is basic agreement that aloof marriage is linked to hypermasculinity and to certain kinds of environmental variables. Many questions remain to be answered. For example, no one has confirmed the obvious: Do societies emphasizing romantic love have more intimate marriages? There is the related question of whether romantic love and marital intimacy are linked to a society’s divorce norms or level of divorce. Feminist emphases on sexual inequality, women’s viewpoints, and androgyny—the comfortable blend of masculine and feminine traits—could be applied to the question of marital aloofness. Why should boys’ dual identification with their mothers and fathers make them hypermasculine rather than androgynous? Sexual inequality may be related to marital aloofness, but this issue has not been examined closely. We know that father-infant involvement is more likely in societies with more sexual equality, while hypermasculinity occurs with a stronger division of labor between the sexes. We also need to know more about what aloofness is like from the wife’s viewpoint. Is aloofness a one-way street involving hypermasculinity, or are women motivated to be aloof also? Before the dust is settled around marital aloofness theory and romantic love research, these issues will need to be examined.

In spite of the challenges and the need for further testing of marital aloofness theory, many authors have incorporated it into their work. For example, it fits nicely with sociobiological theory on paternal investment in offspring. Sociobiology believes that a basic human motive is to see that one’s genes are passed down to future generations. People develop different reproductive strategies in different environmental contexts to maximize the chances that their genes are passed on. For example, sociobiology holds that men invest more in their mate’s offspring when they are more confident of paternity, and this investment is said to increase offspring’s chances of surviving to reproduce. One application of this theory views the intimate and aloof patterns and some of their environmental determinants as a learning environment that shapes offsprings’ strategies for mating and for invest-
ing in offspring. In a nutshell, we learn reproductive strategies in our early childhood environment. Children developing in a context of marital intimacy may develop reproductive strategies in which a man mates with one woman and invests more heavily in her offspring. Marital aloofness and father-absence produce offspring who develop strategies of mating with several women but not investing much in their offspring. Women begin mating earlier and have more partners over their lifetimes. Rather than seeing modern father-absent families as broken or dysfunctional, this theory argues that father-absent families trigger reproductive strategies that may be adaptive within certain social and economic contexts. The fate of this application of sociobiological theory rests partly on the outcome of continuing research on the causes and consequences of marital aloofness and intimacy.

**OTHER ASPECTS OF MALE-FEMALE RELATIONSHIPS**

**Sexual Jealousy and Violence**

Cross-cultural researchers are trying to understand sexual jealousy, which they define as the inner state resulting from threats to sexual relationships. In individual situations jealousy may be mild, or it may lead to seemingly senseless rage, violence, and killing. Some authors account for sexual jealousy with sociobiological theory, while others believe cultural factors are more important.

The sociobiological explanation of jealous aggression says that it helps men maximize the chances that their genes are passed on to future generations. It holds that among humans, males invest heavily in their mates’ offspring. This investment is based on men’s certainty of paternity—that is, on their confidence that they are the sires of their mates’ babies. In this theory, men’s capacity for sexual jealousy evolved because it protects men’s certainty in paternity and reduces the chance that they invest in other men’s offspring. Jealousy keeps men alert and ready for aggression against rivals who encroach on existing sexual (reproductive) bonds. A society must have some threshold of paternity
confidence and paternal investment in offspring before jealousy is aroused and triggers aggression. This theory sounds sexist in centering on men’s concerns, but sociobiologists point out that women always know that their babies carry their own genes. They do not have to be on guard against a cheating spouse for the genetic reasons that men may have. Consequently, women’s jealousy is different from men’s.29

Some widespread cultural norms on male-female relationships are interpreted by sociobiological researchers as supporting their ideas on certainty of paternity. For example, adultery and barrenness on the wife’s part are often divorce grounds for men, but not for women.30 Cross-cultural evidence also shows that husbands often are allowed to punish or kill their wives’ paramours (and their wives) even in sexually permissive societies. Wives are rarely allowed an equal right and rarely take similar action.31 Nonetheless, these studies do not account for cross-cultural variation in jealous aggression.

Other theories of jealousy emphasize cultural factors, especially the idea of personal property. Sexual property theory holds that when men own the important resources in society (as they often do in agrarian societies), wives are culturally defined as their husbands’ sexual property, in the sense that the husband gains exclusive rights over his wife’s sexuality. Of course he may have rights to his wife’s labor and offspring as well. Simple foraging societies having a less rigid sense of personal property often have a less elaborated definition of sexual property. In some modern societies where both sexes are property owners, husbands and wives are one another’s mutual sexual property. If wives (or husbands) are culturally defined as sexual property, then a husband (or a wife) feels jealousy, a sense of trespass and violation when this property is used by another. This theory holds that there will be more jealousy and jealous aggression when exclusive sexual property rights are embedded in the culture.32

One cross-cultural study of cultural factors finds men’s jealous aggression (usually socially approved aggression) is related to social constraints on pair-bonding (e.g., arranged marriage, strictures on divorce), to norms restricting sexual gratification (e.g., sex is not allowed outside marriage, or is restricted within), and to property arrangements (e.g., land, dwellings, food, etc. are privately owned). Women’s aggression in sexual jealousy is less than men’s in most societies, and is not at all linked to these three factors.33
While these findings on cultural factors support the sexual property theory, the sociobiological theory of jealousy could be developed to account for them. It is applied to some variable cross-cultural factors such as descent. To give one example of a sociobiological prediction on sexual jealousy, sociobiology would hold that in societies where sex norms make paternity more certain, it is more likely that the wife’s adultery will elicit jealous aggression on the part of the husband. If the theories differ in their predictions, it is in linking jealous aggression to the general notion of personal property. If we are to find which of these theories has the better explanation for jealous aggression, cross-cultural researchers must find more points where the theories generate markedly different predictions on jealousy and aggression. Alternately, perhaps the theories are both needed: Sociobiology seems to account for jealousy’s ferocity, while cultural factors may channel, restrain, or encourage its expression in behavior.

Other Marital Violence

Wife-beating occurs in more societies around the world than any other kind of severe family violence. It is reported in over four-fifths of one cross-cultural sample of preindustrial societies, and occurs in a majority of households in nearly half of these societies. In contrast, husband-beating by wives is reported for about one-fourth of the societies, and these tend to be the same groups in which wives are beaten. While some of this violence is due to cheating spouses and sexual jealousy, it is more often the case that the husband needs no specific grounds for beating his wife. Structural factors that are important in wife-beating include economic and domestic sexual inequality. Wife-beating is also related to the general level of violent conflict resolution in society, but not to marital aloofness, frequency of divorce, or extended family structure. In America today, marital violence has been similarly linked to imbalance of power in marriage and to a tolerance for violence in the family. Nonetheless, severe marital violence (defined as kicking, hitting, biting, or using weapons) is infrequent in America. According to two nationwide surveys conducted in 1975 and 1985, less than 5 percent of husbands or wives used severe violence toward the other at any time during the year of the survey.
Men’s Fear of Sex with Women

In some societies men have a fear of sex with women that is manifested in various beliefs and taboos. Examples of beliefs accompanying sexual fear are that sex is contaminating or debilitating for a man, and that frequent sex depletes a man’s semen. People may desire sex while having these fears of it. A moderate fear of sex can be seen in nineteenth century American “marriage manuals.” In these books, sex experts urged people to avoid frequent sex and to avoid variety in their sex lives. One typical marriage manual asserted that frequent sex and non-coital sex cause numerous physical and mental illnesses and disabilities, including epilepsy. It warned readers to abstain from coitus if it results in any fatigue and recommended that husbands and wives not sleep in the same bed so as to avoid temptation.36

Why would a society’s men fear sex with women? Carol R. Ember lists four explanations, which she tests cross-culturally. First, in warlike groups, men may fear sex with women because wives are often taken from enemy groups. Sex is fearful because one is “sleeping with the enemy,” to quote the title of a book and recent movie. Alternately, fear of sex may reduce fertility in societies where resources are stretched thin from population pressure. Next, fear of sex may reflect a fear of women in societies where fathers are aloof from their wives and sons. Sons’ sexual identity conflicts (discussed in the previous section) may lead them to fear women and sex with women. Finally, a Freudian explanation is allied to aloofness theory. In societies where the mother-son tie is close and the father is aloof, sexual interests between mothers and sons may be heightened, leading to subconscious conflicts being resolved by a fear of sex with women. Ember finds a pattern of correlations suggesting that each theory specifies one factor in a chain of causation like this:

| Population marrying pressure, or enemies | Marrying enemies (food shortage) | Mother sleeps closer to son | Men’s fear of sex with women than to father |

Each factor in the chain is strongly related to its neighbors, but...
less strongly to more distant factors in the chain. While Ember does not intend her work to be an extension of the Whitings’ aloofness theory, the mother-son sleeping variable is similar to other measures of aloofness. She argues that the notion of hypermasculinity from aloofness theory does not help us understand men’s fear of sex with women. Hypermasculine men might view sex as a conquest or a right, but one would not expect hypermasculine men to fear sex.

Ember’s data has been reanalyzed by Kitahara to see if her chain of causes holds up under statistical scrutiny. The reanalysis shows that food shortage has an independent effect on fear of sex and is not simply linked to it through the chain of variables. This work still shows that marrying enemies and mother-son sleeping make up a causal chain affecting men’s fear of sex. A different interpretation is suggested, using the idea of reciprocal inhibition, which holds that anxiety from one source inhibits unrelated responses such as sex. Anxiety from two sources is said to produce men’s fear of sex. Men are anxious about identity conflicts stemming from mother-son sleeping, and both men and women are anxious about food shortage. Each of these anxieties dampens sexual response. The son experiencing these conditions, it is suggested, may have difficulty performing as a man both sexually and socially.

Both Ember and Kitahara argue theoretically that men’s fear of sex with women is in some way linked to hypermasculinity. Is it really? While neither author is testing aloofness theory, the findings on men’s fear of sex with women add to the loose ends accumulating around that theory. Remember that Broude, using different measures, finds that marital aloofness is not related to sexual values and fears. To answer this question, studies need to explicitly associate hypermasculinity and fear of sex, and to associate both of these with aloofness. The effect of overt aggression training on men’s fear of sex also needs to be examined, since this training seems important in hypermasculinity.

Ember’s chain of causes suggests an additional factor producing mother-son sleeping and marital aloofness: marrying one’s enemy. How does the effect of marrying enemies on sleeping arrangements and aloofness compare to the effects of the need for warriors and of the social support factor? To answer this question, we need to discover more about the interplay and relative importance of all three in shaping the various dimensions of marital aloofness and intimacy.
DIVORCE

Many preindustrial societies have very low divorce rates, but some, like the Kanuri of Africa, have even more divorce than the United States does today. Kanuri divorce practices are grounded in their Islamic religion. Kanuri husbands can divorce a wife without any formal grounds or hearing, but wives must go through formal channels and pay a considerable amount. Perhaps because of this restricted access, a wife may intentionally behave in ways that motivate her husband to divorce her. Kanuri women and men typically move through a series of marriages over their lifetimes, with the average number of divorces between two and three per person.39

Why do some societies have so much more divorce than others? In America, we tend to think first about the loss of love and intimacy as the cause of divorce. Cross-cultural research has considered a range of more practical factors. These include the following:

The kinds and extent of rights gained in a spouse may restrict divorce rates: Matrilineal societies typically give the husband no claim to his wife’s offspring and limited claims to her labor, while patrilineal societies give the husband a broad array of rights; consequently, matrilineal societies have been seen as more divorce-prone.

Large marital transactions, such as bridewealth, may help to cement marriage in societies having these practices, for they often have to be returned in the event of divorce.

The sharing of a common social network helps to stabilize marriage, and this is enhanced by community endogamy or cousin marriage.

Women’s equality and autonomy, stemming from labor and other resources under their control, makes for less stable marriages.40

Hendrix and Pearson’s recent cross-cultural study suggests these factors have some impact, but women’s equality and autonomy deserve special attention. They argue that a rigid division of labor in marriage may create disparate interests of husbands and wives and magnify coordination problems, especially in societies with more sexual equality. In support of this idea, they show evidence that societies have less divorce if spouses share both the work of infant care and of food production. Significantly, they
also find that the combination of a rigid division of tasks coupled with more sexual equality in marriage is strongly associated with higher levels of divorce. These findings help us understand why the Kanuri (mentioned before) have so much divorce. Kanuri husbands and wives do different kinds of work, and have somewhat different “social worlds” because of this. While marriage is formally patriarchal, wives have some financial autonomy from property they own, and also have a “safety net” in their own kin group. If a wife does not see eye-to-eye with her husband, she may intentionally not do her part of the work, or just run away. If she persists, her husband is “forced” to divorce her, and is left feeling blue. If Kanuri marriage were truly patriarchal, husbands would be able to force wives to stay and work. With less segregation of labor, spouses would have more common interests and there would be less need for one spouse to have control over the other.

SUMMARY

This chapter has discussed the intertwined topics of marital aloofness and intimacy, romantic love, sexual jealousy, violence, men’s fear of sex with women, and divorce. Marital relationships in America can be viewed in terms of their location within the cross-cultural spectrum. From a cross-cultural perspective, love and marriage do not go together like a “horse and carriage,” as the lyrics of the theme song of the television program Married, with Children put it. We often feel that love-based marriage is natural because middle-class America places extreme emphasis on romantic love as a basis for marriage and on very intimate marriages. It is also characterized by considerable sexual jealousy, but infrequent marital violence from jealousy or other sources. The fear of sex has declined over the past century in America. While surveys show that severe marital violence is uncommon in America today, the public is rightfully alarmed because we value marital intimacy and affection so highly. Divorce is seen as another major social problem. We have much more divorce than we want in America. Divorce, like violence, seems to mark the absence of love and intimacy—something we value highly. However, from a cross-cultural perspective we know that some preindustrial societies remain stable even with divorce rates three
or four times higher than ours is today. Divorce goes against our values, but it is not a total threat to family and kinship institutions.

Cross-cultural researchers have established many empirical links between marriage and other structural and environmental factors. Debate continues on alternative interpretations of these links, and there are many loose ends. We can summarize some of the main generalizations and debates, and can suggest how research might clarify or set new directions for some topics.

Romantic love is recognized in most, if not all, societies, but as the basis for marriage it is less widespread. The assumption that love is a basis for marrying often presumes that it continues to be an important factor holding the marriage together for years to come. Theoretically there is a link between romantic love and marital intimacy, but it needs to be tested empirically and perhaps put into the framework of the debate on marital aloofness and intimacy.

Cross-culturally, aloofness and intimacy are major dimensions of marriage. The Whiting’s theory on aloofness holds that it primarily grows out of the need for warriors in societies needing to protect accumulated subsistence resources. Much research is consistent with this hypothesis, but alternate interpretations are that marriage is aloof when there are strong social support networks outside marriage, or when men marry enemy wives (which also links aloofness with warfare). The use of different measures of aloofness may have helped produce these diverse findings. A study employing every one of the measures of aloofness from past research and looking at all three factors might clarify this situation.

Marital aloofness theory also posits that aloof marriage creates hypermasculinity in sons as a by-product, making sons into better warriors but incompetent at intimate family relations. This is said to happen because the mother is more intimate and powerful in the son’s eyes. Other research indicates that overt aggression training may be more important than aloof marriage or distant fathers in creating hypermasculinity. This research has left women out of the picture. Perhaps feminist emphases on sexual inequality and androgyny might be useful in developing new directions in research on marital aloofness and hypermasculinity.

Sociobiology and sexual property theory are useful in explaining men’s jealous aggression, but do not explain all marital violence. Wife beating is a common practice among the
world’s societies. Jealousy sometimes leads to wife-beating, but is only one of several circumstances triggering it. Sexual inequality is another important factor in the frequency of wife-beating.

Both theories of jealousy predict that jealous aggression is stronger in societies where marriage and women’s sexuality are tightly restricted. A problem for cross-cultural research is that the facts supporting one theory also tend to support the other. This problem might be eased if research on jealousy took on some of the concerns of studies of romantic love and of marital aloofness and intimacy. The possessive passion of romantic love would seem to make it a breeding ground for sexual jealousy, yet this link has been little explored outside of western societies. Courtship violence is more likely with romantic practices, and some of this violence may stem from jealousy.

Men’s fear of sex with women may be related to identity conflicts that grow from mother-son sleeping arrangements, but may also be related to anxieties about food shortage. Both this and the marital aloofness research bring in variables that are tangentially about warfare (marrying enemy wives, men’s pursuit of military glory, etc.) without ever directly contrasting warlike and non-warlike groups. There is a need to clarify the associations of warfare variables with marital aloofness, socialization, and fear of sex.

The level of divorce varies tremendously across cultures. Factors having some impact on divorce include the kinds of goods and rights exchanged when a marriage is established, the extent to which spouses share social networks and interests, and the extent to which spouses are segregated in their work. The degree of sexual equality is a key factor that may influence how these other factors impact on divorce. With less commonality of interest between spouses, sexual equality may make resolving marital conflicts more difficult, and thus make ending marriage more likely. While more theorizing and research is needed on this very basic matter of marital stability, cross-cultural research has policy implications. It suggests that gains in sexual equality can produce losses in marital stability, but these can be mitigated if spouses share in work, in childcare, and in other interests, so that they are motivated to stay together. If as a nation we value both equality and stability in marriage, we need to promote sharing of work in paid labor, in childrearing and housework, and in the work of managing conflict and maintaining intimacy within marriage.
NOTES


14. This socio-emotional distance between husbands and wives is documented most recently in David L. Harvey, *Potter Addition* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1993), who indeed interprets marital relations as one factor in a vicious circle in which poverty begets poverty generation after generation.


22. For qualitative studies of working class marriage and family life, see Lillian Rubin, *Worlds of Pain* (New York: Basic Books, 1976); and Harvey, *Potter Addition*. While the marriages described in these two books are not nearly as aloof as those considered by the Whitings, there appears to be substantially less closeness and sharing than in middle-class American marriages.

23. Broude, “The Relationship of Marital Intimacy and Aloofness to Social Environment”; and Broude, “Male-Female Relationships in Cross-Cultural Perspective.” One aloof pattern, separate eating, is related to male sexual hostility, impotence concerns, and male boasting, and these suggest that men do have sexual identity worries.

Brubaker, “Aloof Marriage, Subsistence, and the Socialization of Boys.”


27. Broude, “The Division of Labor by Sex and Other Gender Related Variables.”


31. Daly, Wilson, and Weghorst, “Male Sexual Jealousy.”


All these authors recognize that rights other than sexual rights are gained by spouses in marriage. These often include rights to labor and rights to offspring.


38. Michio Kitahara, “Men’s Heterosexual Fear Due to Reciprocal Inhibition,” *Ethos* 9: 37–50. Kitahara’s explanation seems to say that sons with initial female identities will be wimps rather than hypermasculine, so we may ask why they would go to war and marry enemy wives. The explanation may work, if hypermasculinity is a product of special overt training of boys, as one study shows, and not a by-product of mother-son sleeping.


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**Suggested Readings**


Minturn, Leigh. *Sita’s Daughters: Coming Out of Purdah*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. Minturn recounts her previous observations of the aloof, segregated relationship between husband and wife in this North Indian community, and discusses the changes that are currently underway.

nating details about her experiences with !Kung traditions regarding sex, trial marriage, and polygynous marriage.