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Mate Selection and Family Formation

According to the mate selection and the marriage criteria in different cultures and geographies around the world, the process can be of three different types. Marriages can be performed via capture, arrangement or free-choice selection of the mate. There are many regions around the world such as Africa, Asia, Middle East and Caucasus where marriage by force is practiced. It is done by taking a wife without her or her family’s consent. The groom provides a ‘Brides money’ to the family or impregnates the woman thus claiming to have her in his courtship. It was a common practice during the times of the war as Bible encouraged men to take wives of the captives that they found them attractive. The other form of marriage is by arrangement where it is planned by the families of the both bride and the groom. The partners have very little or no say in the matter of selection of the mate. It is a very common practice in many societies and can be done by the parents, professional matchmakers, families or social media in some societies. It also includes the ‘Brideprice that the groom pays to the bride’s family in order to compensate them for their loss of her services to the family. In other societies, the concept of ‘Dowry’ also exists where the bride’s family pays the groom as an incentive to relieve the family of the financial burden. While in the ancient Greece, Rome and modern Asian and Middle East societies consider as an important element of an honorable marriage. There is also a concept of ‘Groomprice’ that the bride’s family pay to the groom so he may use it as he sees fit.

The arranged marriage also deals with the notion of ‘Sororate’ and ‘Levirate’ and these are applied when the first spouse dies. In the practice of Sororate, a sister, cousin or any other close female relative of the previous wife has to marry the man and compensate the place of the first wife. While Levirate is a norm where the brother of the deceased husband has to marry his widowed wife. Sororate is mainly used in the case of the marriage transactions in terms of money and is comparatively less common than Levirate. Marriage by free-choice includes the selection of mate by the consent and choice of two individuals. However, in majority of the societies, it is not entirely free choice as there are certain marital regulations involved namely exogamy and endogamy. Exogamy prohibits people to marry within their group or close family members and is considered as incest taboo. Endogamy, on the other hand, limits people to marry within their group based on the race, religion, ethnicity and social class. Propinquity is the concept of marrying within closer geographical proximities.

The mate selection is also based on the courtship and sexual relationships of the individuals. It includes the dating and meeting stages of initiating any relationship with whom one feels compatible. The purpose of courtship is to allow individuals to get to know each other on various levels while prohibiting the act of kissing and having sex from obscuring their judgement. It helps building the spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical bonding before sexual experience. However, in modern Western societies, people engage in sexual relationships upon puberty and is considered as part of life without being seen as societal taboo (Ingoldsby).

In every society, the marriage culture, traditions and practices are different based on social classes, ethnicity, religion and even gender. In my family, I interviewed my uncle’s wife who is Italian. Due to her cultural affiliations, I always wondered to have asked her about the mate selection and marriage traditions in Italy. They got married some 23 years ago in New York when my aunt was here on her medical practice. My uncle and aunt met each other and fell in love with each other and wanted to marry, however, their families did not get along due to cultural differences and my aunt’s parents did not allow her to marry someone out their Italian brotherhood. She had to fight and it took a very long time to make her family agree over this relationship. Italian families are well integrated and important decisions are only taken by the elders of the family. Moreover, in their culture, the say of the females in marital affairs is not as much as compared to males. Females are obliged to listen to their fathers, brothers and uncles. The relationships in their culture are mainly initiated with dating and courtship and the family basically approves of the date. When the couple gets along fine, the families then move forward to set the marriage with the blessings of the elders.

The Italians primarily practice the concept of endogamy and there are several social constraints as who shall date whom. They need to date one of their own as the traditional families often discourage marrying outside of their people. There is also a difference in following the marriage pattern as males still can get some leverage and marry a woman from outside of their group. To this date, Italians undergo two different wedding ceremonies; civil and ecclesiastic. It is done in order to provide some time lapse for the young couples so they can get to meet and understand each other while their families get to negotiate over several stuff such as other marriage rituals and dowry. It can be generalized from their experience that Italians are family oriented people and their marriage rituals are based on very old traditions and even counterparts of my generation in their families tend to follow and respect then. This case lies in the middle grounds as the partners are allowed to choose each other while following certain family traditions while in the Medieval Italy, the pattern of arranged marriage is still followed strictly. As far as my family is concerned, the matter of my marriage shall be entirely based on the romantic-companionate marriage. My family supports marriage by choice without any restriction of exogamy or endogamy.

Works Cited

Ingoldsby, Bron B. “Mate Selection and Marriage Around the World.” *Seeing Ourselves: Classic, Contemporary, and Cross-Cultural Readings in Sociology*, 1998, p. 320.