Marriage Practices in Lowland South America

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Marriage Rules, Marriage Exchange, and the Definition of Marriage in Lowland South American Societies

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The major anthropological contributions to the study of marriage over the past three decades have been made by scholars working within the framework established by Claude Lévi-Strauss in his 1949 treatise on kinship and marriage. Lévi-Strauss and his followers, who developed the body of literature that has come to be known as "alliance theory,"[1] concentrated on topics that have traditionally been central to anthropological inquiries into marriage: the rules governing choice of spouse and the relationship between such rules and systems of kinship terminology. They focused on certain basic and recurrent marriage rules, which were analyzed as types of exchange, and interpreted kin classifications as expressions of these marriage rules.

The essays in this volume provide a rich body of data on marriage rules and marriage exchange in lowland South American Indian societies. The ethnographic material presented here and the theoretical orientations underlying the analyses have important implications for alliance theory, and for the more general question of how systems of kin classification are to be interpreted. I will outline some of these implications in the discussion that follows.

I will also be devoting attention to the use of "marriage" as a comparative concept. Though the definition of marriage is not a focus in these essays, it has not been totally ignored either. Two contributors, Kensinger and Dole, have felt it appropriate to consider the general issue of how marriage can be defined cross-culturally. Because their views raise interesting and important points, and because the question of how marriage is defined—both generally and in lowland South American societies—might reasonably arise in the minds of those reading a col-

lection of essays on the subject of marriage, I would like to take up the matter here. There will, moreover, be certain points of convergence between my discussion of alliance theory and my discussion of marriage as a comparative concept, since anthropologists working in the Lévi-Straussian structuralist tradition have figured prominently in debate over the definition of marriage (Leach 1951; Needham 1971b, 1975; Rivière 1971).

Marriage Rules and the Classification of Kin

Most of the societies described in this volume are characterized by the kind of kin classificatory system commonly referred to as "Dravidian": the universe of kinsmen is bifurcated along the lines of a cross/parallel distinction and terms for cross relatives are the same as terms for affines. Such a system of classification accords with what some call cross-cousin marriage and others prefer to think of as prescriptive alliance or direct exchange.[2] It has been suggested by one ethnographer of South America (Rivière 1973) that Dravidian systems are a particularly significant diagnostic feature of South American tropical forest societies.[3]

There has been considerable debate among anthropologists about Dravidian systems (see Buchler and Selby 1968:135-48). The term came into the literature through the work of Louis Dumont, who emphasized that certain of the terminologies which in the past might have been labeled "bifurcate-merging" or "Iroquois" could only be properly understood if one recognized the essentially affinal meaning of terms for cross relatives (Dumont 1953a). The distinction between Dravidian and Iroquois terminologies has come to be understood as a matter of the contrast between bifurcate-merging terminologies that reflect a positive marriage rule (through the equation of cross kin with affines and a mode of extending kin terms in accordance with inherited relations of affinity) and those that do not.

This understanding of Dravidian systems of kin classification has been challenged by Scheffler (1971). Scheffler sees the main distinction between Dravidian- and Iroquois-type systems to lie in how they respectively extend terms to more distant relatives. In Dravidian-type terminologies the cross/parallel distinction is applied consistently throughout the system; thus, for example, the children of a man one's mother calls by a sibling term are classified differently from children of a man one's mother calls by a cross-cousin term. In Iroquois-type systems, on the other hand, cousin reckoning depends only on the relative sex of the linking relatives in the first ascending generation; thus, for example, children of male relatives on the mother's side, be they related to the mother as parallel or cross relatives, are classified in the same manner.

It would appear that the pattern of genealogical extensions in Dravidian systems accords with the perpetuation of affinal relations across the generations, whereas the Iroquois pattern does not. Scheffler, however, is at pains to dissociate Dravidian kin terminology from affinity, and notes that Dravidian-type genealogical extensions are not always found in association with the kinds of affinal equations (e.g., MB = WF) that are usually assumed to characterize this system of kin classification. He does not present any statistical data on patterns of association among the various features that alliance-minded anthropologists have considered to be a part of Dravidian systems, and one suspects that the situation may be less random than Scheffler would have us believe. In any event, Scheffler's assertion that patterns of genealogical extension should take priority over the presence or absence of affinal equations, which Scheffler sees as secondary or epiphenomenal, cannot be justified on general theoretical grounds but, rather, follows from Scheffler's own analytic concerns. It is just as easy, perhaps even easier, to argue for the comparative interest of typologizing terminologies according to whether or not they have implications for marriage. A particularly good case for what is to be gained, ethnographically and analytically, from focusing on the relationship between kin classification and marriage is made by the essays published here.

It should also be pointed out that the approach taken by Scheffler involves a relative lack of concern with how people actually reckon kin ties, as opposed to how they might conceivably be reckoning them. For example, Scheffler phrases the difference between genealogical extensions in Dravidian and Iroquois systems in terms of how many generations back one goes in distinguishing between same-sex and cross-sex sibling links. In the foregoing discussion I have rephrased the distinction in terms of how ego's first ascending generation relatives classify one another. This seems more appropriate for societies like those of lowland South America, where genealogical reckoning is generally quite shallow, and also leaves open the question of whether the ties are being reckoned consanguineally or affinally. This latter question (should terms in a Dravidian system be translated as "mother's brother," "mother's brother's son," etc. or rather as "spouse's father," "classificatory husband/brother-in-law," etc.) has occasioned a certain amount of abstract theoretical debate in the anthropological literature, but is more appropriately viewed as an ethnographic matter. Several of the essays in this volume present information on how relationships are actually calculated in the societies under discussion and thus provide information relevant to questions such as these.[4]

While anthropologists with a genealogical orientation, like Scheffler, have taken issue with alliance theorists over the affinal significance of

Dravidian terminologies, it is also important to note that their respective approaches are in some ways not as dissimilar as they might appear. Alliance theorists commonly claim that the true referents of kin terms are social categories rather than genealogically defined kinsmen or kin types. Their own approach, however, is equally dependent on genealogical modes of analysis.[5] This dependence may remain covert but often takes the form of lists of genealogical equations. Alliance theorists sometimes apologize for their use of genealogical notation, claiming that it is merely a matter of convenience (Needham 1971b, Rivière 1973), but these disclaimers are unconvincing. What alliance theorists share with avowed genealogists is a relatively narrow focus on the referential properties of kin terms.

This can be seen if we consider the meaning of "prescription" as this concept is used in the literature on marriage rules, where it commonly appears in opposition to the notion of marriage "preferences."[6] This opposition, which in some writings has been associated with the strength of a marriage rule as measured by the proportion of actual marriages that adhere to it, is now most commonly used to draw a contrast between the positive marriage rule encoded in the kin classificatory system itself, which is labeled the "prescription," and any other norms governing choice of spouse, which tend to fall into a residual category, or at least to receive considerably less attention. Divorced both from actual marriage patterns and from the body of lore that exists within a society regarding desirable and undesirable forms of marriage, the notion of a prescriptive marriage rule comes down to a commentary on certain referential properties of the kin terminological system. Such interpretation of a kin terminology is by no means without interest, but it involves a strict limitation on the kinds of ethnographic data that go into the analysis and are rendered more intelligible thereby.

Just as it is impossible to decide from a Dravidian kin terminological system *per se* whether terms for cross kin are best translated in consanguineal or affinal terms,[7] so, more generally, is it impossible to achieve an ethnographically adequate account of the meaning of kin classifications and marriage rules by sorting consanguineally and affinally defined denotata and drawing up genealogical equations. We must instead turn to studies like the ones presented in this collection, which explore the varied meanings of both kin terms and marriage rules, and take into account the wider context of cultural beliefs that give them their significance.[8] These essays show us that what we gloss as "cross kin" may be viewed as either strangers or friends (or both); they analyze how marriage preferences reflect cosmological principles and how marriage strategies are attempts to achieve culturally defined goals that are at once political and spiritual. They enable us to understand how a similar Dra-

vidian classificatory structure operates in conjunction with such differing social organizational arrangements as cognatic kindreds, patrilineal descent groups, and moieties, at the same time presenting us with information on variation within these categories.

To take some examples, both Basso and Kaplan describe the meaning of marriage practices in societies in which cognatic kinship combines with a Dravidian bifurcation of the kin universe. In her analysis of the Kalapalo, Basso devotes particular attention to concepts of relationship and affinity. She analyzes the polysemous nature of the Kalapalo term translatable as "relative," a matter that she has also discussed at length in previous publications (Basso 1970, 1973). The class of relatives may cover the entire range of cognatic kinsmen, classificatory consanguines as well as affines, or it may be construed more narrowly so as to distinguish nonmarriageable classificatory consanguines from potential marriage partners. These usages vary with social context, depending on what kind of relationship is being emphasized. When a general principle of kin solidarity is being invoked, the term "relative" will be used in its wider sense; when the particular question of marriage is at issue, potential affines will be excluded from the category of "relative." Basso's discussion of the concept of *ifutisu,* or "respect," as the moral quality characteristic of kin relationships throws interpretive light on this pattern of use. Degree of *ifutisu,* which varies with closeness of relationship (defined not in directly genealogical terms but with respect to household, factional, and village affiliation), differentiates relations of classificatory consanguinity from those of potential affinity. The people one may marry are people with whom one feels socially more distant. As Basso puts it, "Kalapalo marriage is . . . an alliance between sibling sets (*ifisúandaw*) who are considered suitable spouse exchangers because of their social distance, not because of some a priori exchange relationship" (p. 37). Elsewhere Basso has stated that, for the Kalapalo, "affinal categories can be thought of as 'neutral' with respect to kinship as a cultural category." That is, those one may marry either fall into the category of relatives or they do not, a distinction that is not of importance to the Kalapalo; thus, according to Basso, it would be an error to analyze affinity as a subcategory of kinship (Basso 1975:214).

Turning to the Piaroa, we find, in contrast to the Kalapalo, a definite positive value placed on "marrying close." According to Kaplan, this is understood in three different ways. One is in terms of multiple exchange, that is, replicating the marriage of a close kinsman in order to tighten the affinal links between family units. An example is marriage with a brother's wife's sister. This principle does not itself concern genealogical relationship between marriage partners.[9] Genealogical closeness does, however, figure in another definition of marrying close, which is marrying

a first-degree cross cousin, either matrilateral or patrilateral. Here one marries within one's close kindred and also replicates an affinal link established in the previous generation. Kaplan sees this rule as part of a conceptual model of the cognatic kindred as a bounded group with continuity over time (see also J. Kaplan 1973). The third definition of marrying close is marrying within the house, a residential expression of the rule of cognatic kindred integrity. Where, for demographic or political reasons, Piaroa marriages do not conform to the ideal of "marrying close," they are ideologically assimilated to the category of marriages between close kinsmen, with the help of such devices as the use of teknonyms between affines (J. Kaplan 1972). Kaplan also discusses a dynamic process affecting the relationship categories of consanguine and affine such that relatively distant consanguines are reclassified as affines and thereafter reabsorbed into the closed cognatic sphere through marriage.

Looking at these two cases comparatively, it seems that the Kalapalo see marriage as creating, but not presupposing, a close relationship: a close tie results from marriage rather than serving as a precondition for it.[10] The fact that the relationship, once set up, entails such rights as further marriage within the same generational level (what has been referred to above as "multiple exchange"), as well as the perpetuation of the marital exchange in the succeeding generation, might seem to pose a contradiction. The solution is apparently that the Kalapalo themselves look at the exchange relationship between sibling sets as a whole, involving two generations.[11]

The Piaroa, on the other hand, view marriage as both presupposing and creating close kin ties. Close marriages confirm the ideal model of society as composed of endogamous bounded kindreds; more distant marriages define new kindred boundaries. Perhaps we may say that, while the Kalapalo think in terms of groups of people *between whom* affinal relations are established, the Piaroa think more in terms of the unit *within which* marital relationships take on their significance. The Piaroa thus deal with marriages that create, rather than presuppose, close kindred ties by seeking to obliterate the distinction between close natal kinsmen and new kinsmen.

A number of other essays in this collection address the meaning of cousin terms and marriage rules with respect to norms for marrying close or marrying at a distance. Kensinger analyzes what marrying close means to the Cashinahua, for whom it is a matter both of village, or more particularly, faction endogamy, and of the special value placed on marriage between first-degree double cross cousins. The privileged nature of the double cross-cousin union, which replicates a sister exchange in the

previous generation, is reflected in the Cashinahua classification of marriage types, analyzed in detail by Kensinger, and in the terms used for this particular marriage partner, which combine the terms for "husband" or "wife" with the term *kuin,* meaning "true" or "real." In fact, the Cashinahua distinguish both between marriage with a double as opposed to a single first-degree cross cousin, and between marriage with either type of cross cousin and with a member of the wider class of marriageables defined by the moiety and section system.[12]

On the other side, both Kracke in his study of the Kagwahiv (p. 101) and Dole in her study of the Kuikuru (pp. 55-56) have discussed connections between terms for "cross cousin" and terms for "stranger" or "nonrelative." Dole places the issue in historical perspective, pointing to apparent cognates between cross-cousin terms in other Carib languages and the term used to indicate a lack of relationship among the Kuikuru, who, like the Kalapalo, are a Carib-speaking group of the Upper Xingú region.[13] Excellent descriptions of the meaning of cousin terms and marriage preferences among groups in the Northwest Amazon have been published by Jackson (1977) and C. Hugh-Jones (1979). These studies analyze the range in cousin categories and concomitantly in types of marriage, from an ongoing alliance with a closely related group to the establishment of new marital ties with relative strangers.

These data have implications for the way in which the term "prescription," as used by alliance theorists, can be applied to the lowland South American region. Lévi-Strauss originally developed the notion of prescription in the context of an opposition between "elementary structures of kinship," in which marriage was regulated by a positive kin-based rule, and "complex structures," in which the kinship system operated only negatively with respect to marriage, leaving spouse selection to other mechanisms.[14] It is worth examining more closely what the concept of a positive marriage rule might mean, so that we can better judge the appropriateness of using the term "prescription" for the marriage systems of the different societies we have been discussing.

A kin classificatory system involving a bifurcation of the domain of kinsmen into consanguines and affines may operate in either of the following ways: (1) The universe of relatives, including both consanguines and affines, is part of a larger universe of social relations in which relatives are contrasted with nonrelatives. Here the positive marriage rule, as defined in the kinship system, serves to delimit a set of marriageables in opposition not only to consanguineal relatives but to nonrelatives as well. (2) The relationship terminology constitutes an all-embracing social classification that extends to cover the entire field of social relations. In this case kin terms have a stronger "creative" function (see note 10),

that is, they play a greater role in actually bringing into existence the relationships that they designate. Systems of this sort may vary in terms of whether consanguinity or affinity serves as the major idiom for extending the range of kin. Extension in an affinal mode, which is more common in lowland South American societies, poses the problem of just what we mean when we speak of a positive marriage rule.

In 1943 Lévi-Strauss drew attention to the way in which the Nambikwara used affinal terms—in particular, the classificatory "brother-in-law" term—to establish relationships between members of two groups entering into contact with one another. This practice has since been described for other groups, for example, the Yanomama (Shapiro 1972:84-89; 1974). A related pattern is one we might call consanguineal fade-out, in which all but close consanguines can be redefined as marriageable, particularly if relationships can be traced to them in more than one way, as is commonly the case in small-scale societies like those of lowland South America. Where the kinship system has a patrilateral emphasis, as among the Yanomama, the fade-out from consanguinity to potential affinity is more rapid on the mother's side (Chagnon 1968:64, Shapiro 1972:73-77).

In cases like this it is necessary to call attention to a basic asymmetry in the contrastive categories of "consanguineals," or nonmarriageables, and "affines," or marriageables. The first is a relatively fixed and limited set, characterized by a previous history of social relations, while the latter is an inherently expandable one. If we wish in such cases to speak of a positive marriage rule applying to the affinal category as a whole, we can say that marriages are contracted only with people who are placed in a moral and social universe defined by the relationship terminology. This way of putting things has more to do with the culture, or ideology, of social relations than with the amalgam of social organizational and abstract structural considerations that lay behind the original concept of "elementary structures."

Turning back to the various ethnographic cases mentioned thus far, it can be seen that the concept of a positive marriage rule is differentially applicable and has varied meanings. In some cases we may well speak of a value being placed on marriage within a defined category of kin. In others the category of marriageables may essentially be seen as a category of relative strangers; cross relatives may be lumped with nonrelatives. In some societies the kin classification expands to encompass the entire sphere of those with whom one sustains social contact; in others this is less so. In the Northwest Amazon region a closed model of the social order, in which all local groups are viewed as being in some kind of kin relation to one another, seems to coexist with an open model, in

which groups to whom one is related are contrasted with groups who are viewed as unknown and unrelated (Jackson 1977:87, C. Hugh-Jones 1979:92-93). In this area one finds positive preferences for marriage with particular close relatives, notably with the father's sister's daughter; the major norm regulating marriage, however, is the negative rule of descent group exogamy.

A historical perspective on marriage in lowland South America suggests cases in which positive rules have given way to kinship systems that regulate marriage through prohibition only. Perhaps one can see a predisposition toward change of this sort in an inherent priority of negative rules. Kensinger's account of the many principles governing Cashinahua marriage, for example, indicates that the most fundamental and only truly inviolable rule is the prohibition of marriage among "real" (*kuin*) kinsmen.[15] The shift from positive rule to negative rule seems to have taken place in the marriage system of the Kuikuru, along with a related change toward the more exclusive use of generational terminology among same-generation kinsmen. To be sure, it is difficult to determine the degree to which apparent differences between the Kuikuru and Kalapalo are to be attributed to the differing analytic orientations of the anthropologists who have studied them. Dole's explanation of the Kuikuru case, moreover, is problematic in that it posits a necessary connection between local group exogamy, the maintenance of a bifurcate-merging kin classification, and a positive marriage rule (Dole 1969). Her argument seems to rest on the idea that kinsmen cannot be distinguished from one another for purposes of marriage if they are living in the same place, a line of reasoning that is questionable on both logical and ethnographic grounds.

While some of the particular explanations that have been proposed for changes in marriage patterns may be overly simple and monistic,[16] the dislocations and severe depopulation brought about by colonialist penetration into the tropical forest area is certainly crucial in cases about which we have information. One such case is the Tapirapé of central Brazil, who have been the subject of ethnographic research for five decades. The Tapirapé prohibit marriage between close kinsmen and have no particular positive marriage rule; their system of kin classification distinguishes same-generation relatives by sex and age only. Comparison with the kin classifications of linguistically related groups provides persuasive evidence for the former existence of a bifurcate-merging, and hence probably Dravidian, relationship system (MacDonald 1965, Shapiro 1968). Factors to be considered in the Tapirapé case include the influence of their Gê-speaking neighbors, who do not share the general patterns of marriage and kin classification we have been discussing here,

but also the sudden reduction of Tapirapé population during the first half of the twentieth century and the resulting dislocation with respect to kinship and village organization.

The effects of social change on lowland South American marriage systems, a very important topic that cannot be given the attention it deserves here, is mentioned in several of the articles in this volume. Kracke considers how a historical event like the absorption of a foreign group might have initiated a transformation in the Kagwahiv marriage system; he also inquires into the possibility that the Kagwahiv have acquired their moiety system relatively recently. Changes brought about by the colonial situation are a central concern in the papers by Crocker and Lyon. The particular question of how missionaries have impinged on indigenous marriage practices is treated by Jackson, Sorensen, and Lyon. In the Vaupés, changes in local group composition resulting from the creation of Catholic mission villages have disrupted traditional patterns of residential exogamy. Catholic missionaries in this region have actively sought to do away with sister exchange, an ideal type of marriage as far as the Indians are concerned, since the missionaries consider it a form of selling women (Jackson, pp. 162, 173). Sorensen (p. 189) mentions that missionaries have encouraged the abandonment of language group exogamy, a cardinal principle regulating marriage in the Northwest Amazon area, but indicates that they have made little headway thus far.

Alliance and Exchange

The "classic" model of alliance theory, as it developed in complementary opposition to descent theory, was based on the role of marriage in articulating and maintaining relationships between corporate kin groups through ties of affinity transmitted from one generation to the next. This model is problematic in the lowland South American context, particularly given the general absence of the kinds of corporate groups that figure as units of exchange in descriptions of alliance systems in other parts of the world.[17] Rivière (1973) has suggested that we avoid the term "alliance" altogether in speaking of marriage patterns among South American tropical forest peoples, and that we take care to distinguish terminological "lines" from descent constructs.

In his description of the Kagwahiv, Kracke speaks of alliances between "lines" of patrilineally related kinsmen. He notes, however, that these genealogically defined patrilines are the analyst's construct; they are neither corporate groups nor culturally recognized units. (pp. 108, 118). Jackson considers alliance to be one of the principles governing Vaupés marriage patterns, meaning by this the perpetuation of an exchange relationship between local descent groups (pp. 162-63). Sorensen (p. 192)

notes a preference for matrilateral marriage (which exists alongside one for double cross-cousin marriage), but deals with this in reference to individual males in search of wives rather than in terms of relationships between groups. The unilateral preference that is more generally reported for the Northwest Amazon is for father's sister's daughter marriage (Jackson 1977 and this volume, C. Hugh-Jones 1979). Since societies in the Northwest Amazon present more of the familiar features of descent systems, including segmentary organization, than do other societies in lowland South America, one would expect that the concept of alliance would be more appropriate as well. C. Hugh-Jones (1979: 84-100) has discussed the particular value the Pirá-paraná Indians place on a continuing marital alliance associated with father's sister's daughter marriage; such an alliance, however, is one of several types of marriage in a system that is primarily oriented around the principle of exogamy.

Where affinal exchange cannot be seen as a continuing relationship between corporate kin groups, what are the parties involved? And what relationship is being perpetuated?

In studies of lowland South American societies, including the ones in this volume, the parties in a marital exchange are often identified as sibling sets or families. Local group membership commonly affects the norms of exchange between families. These points are well illustrated in Price's (1977) discussion of marital exchange among the Nambikwara of central Brazil. The Nambikwara consider marriage an exchange between two families, ideally taking the form of direct sibling exchange (sister exchange from a man's point of view and brother exchange from a woman's). The social importance of the village is revealed in the different treatment of marriages within and outside the community. When a marriage takes place between members of the same village, there is no insistence on immediate reciprocity. However, when marriage outside the village poses the threat of a loss to the community, direct compensation is sought (Price 1977, personal communication).[18] These data call to mind Maurice Bloch's (1973) discussion of "the long term and the short," in which the moral quality of a reciprocity that is eventual and not too closely calculated is contrasted with exchange relationships in which immediate return is expected or demanded.

If families or sibling sets are commonly the units involved in relationships of marital exchange, the time depth with which such exchange relationships are conceptualized seems to be a span of two generations. This is implied in Basso's discussion of *itsahene* (brother-sister exchange) marriages (p. 37) and is made explicit by Kracke in his analysis of patrilateral cross-cousin marriage, sister's daughter marriage, and the ritual expression of the marriage cycle among the Kagwahiv. Jackson's Bará informants express their preference for father's sister's daughter

marriage over mother's brother's daughter marriage in terms of their concern for completing an exchange in the next generation rather than maintaining an outstanding debt (p. 168)—another example of the tendency toward direct and short-term exchange. A two-generational exchange relationship structured around patrilateral cross-cousin marriage has been desecribed for the Matsiguenga, who combine this practice with a preference for dispersing rather than repeating marital exchanges at a single genealogical level (Casevitz 1972, cited in Dreyfus 1977:382). The difference between these marriage practices and the kind of continuing exchange relations with which classical alliance theory is concerned may be likened to the distinction social anthropologists draw between cumulative filiation and descent.

A case of marriage preferences formulated in terms of a greater time depth is presented in the Whittens' account of the Canelos Quichua, who are explicitly concerned with affinal relationships in the grandparental generation. These relationships are in turn referred to a more remote ancestral period, since they are believed to replicate patterns dating from the "Time of the Grandparents," which can be understood in both mythic and historical terms (see, for example, Whitten 1976a:214). The Whittens' focus on the cultural meaning of Canelos marriage preferences leads, however, in a direction quite different from the concerns of alliance theory. Their account, like Kaplan's analysis of the Piaroa, provides an excellent case for studying the dynamic interplay of affinal and consanguineal kin categories in the context of cognatic descent and kindred organization. Both studies show the indissoluble connection between politico-religious leadership patterns and the kinship system, exploring the native concepts that order and link these domains.

In their report of how genealogical considerations enter into the Canelos reckoning of marriage preferences, the Whittens take account of both male and female perspectives. Their paper constitutes an important contribution to the study of parallel transmission, a matter that receives considerable attention in Crocker's essay as well.[19] The data on women's marital strategies are particularly welcome, since studies of marriage patterns, like studies of social organization more generally, have tended to be skewed toward the male perspective.[20] It is to be hoped that students of marriage in lowland South America, and elsewhere as well, will engage in more explicit comparison between the views of male and female informants, since these may differ in interesting ways. In the case of the Canelos, for example, if I understand the Whittens' data correctly, men and women seem to be somewhat at cross-purposes in what each would consider the ideal marriage (pp. 196-97).

The male focus that has generally characterized studies of kinship and marriage takes the specific form in alliance theory of viewing marriage

systems as exchanges of women carried out by groups of men. As we have seen in the Nambikwara case above, however, what looks to male informants like an exchange of women may be viewed by female informants as an exchange of men. Crocker discusses why the concept of "exchange" as alliance theorists understand it is inappropriate in the Canela case; according to Crocker, the Canela see their own marriage system not in terms of women being "exchanged" but in terms of men being "moved" (notes 14, 15).

The essays in this collection offer rich cultural analyses of marriage practices in lowland South American societies. Studies like those of Kaplan and the Whittens show how an understanding of cosmological beliefs enables us better to interpret marriage rules and preferences. The Whittens outline the connection between the Canelos' marriage preferences and their beliefs about the transmission of soul substances from one generation to the next, which is partly a matter of inheritance and partly the result of achievement. For Canelos men, the world of kinship and marriage merges with shamanistic aspirations; for women, kin and affinal ties are linked with the passing on of pottery traditions. Kaplan's analysis of Piaroa marriage becomes part of an inquiry into the cosmological significance of dualism in the Piaroa world view. Her essay may be compared with Crocker's analysis of different types of dual opposition in Canela thought, which moves us beyond the concept of binary opposition as it is generally presented in the work of structuralists.

These studies come at a time when the anthropological investigation of social organization has been moving beyond its traditional boundaries to include the kind of material that was often, in standard monographs, treated under such separate rubrics as "religion," "ideology," or "world view." Studies like Christine Hugh-Jones's recent monograph on the Pirá-paraná Indians of the Northwest Amazon (1979) mark what is coming to be a particularly productive period in South American ethnography. What remains to be seen more clearly is how analyses like these can figure in comparative investigation. Structuralists, in general, see comparison to be possible only in terms of fairly abstract notions of formal relations. "Culturological" or "symbolic" approaches tend to entail interpretive schemata that are intended as specific to one society. Insights gained from these kinds of studies must now be formulated in terms appropriate to focused and specific comparative research.

In this volume, investigations of how marriage practices are reflected linguistically in kin terminological systems are supplemented with fuller consideration of how marriage is talked about. Kensinger's paper, for example, provides data on the different ways in which the Cashinahua formulate marriage preferences and evaluate the social and moral desir-

ability of different types of union. He tells us about both the ideals they share and the terms in which they express their disagreements. Sorensen's essay on the process of finding a wife in the Northwest Amazon takes into account the fact that marriage has also to do with love, which is a rather refreshing reminder.

The material presented in these essays is particularly relevant to a topic of perennial interest and debate in anthropological writings on kinship and marriage: the relationship of genealogy to social classification. The so-called genealogical method is something that many anthropologists have come to look upon as at once a methodological convenience (or even necessity) and a theoretical embarrassment. Others have reacted to the limits it has placed on social anthropological inquiry by rejecting the notion of genealogy altogether, on apparently a prioristic grounds. This is an issue that must, however, be formulated as an ethnographic problem. The question of whether a marriage rule should be understood with reference to genealogically specified kinsmen or more general terminologically defined classes, for example, to which much theoretical debate has been devoted, is one that can be answered through close attention to how people talk about marriage.

If genealogical concepts serve as a necessary but not sufficient bridge to an understanding of what are now being called "relationship terminologies" (in an attempt to avoid the taboo term "kinship"), we have to come to terms with why this is so. We must also have more truly "ethnogenealogical" studies of the sort presented here by the Whittens, which show us the meanings attributed to genealogical relationships in particular cultures.

The Definition of Marriage

The question of how marriage is itself defined,[21] which has occasioned a certain amount of reflection and debate among anthropologists, has, for the most part, not been raised in the studies presented in this volume. One reason for this is that the relationships we label "marriage" in lowland South American societies do not present the kinds of features that anthropologists have found particularly problematic—for example, marital unions between members of the same sex or an unusually attenuated relationship between spouses. Marriage, as we encounter it in this region, generally comprises the familiar features of sexual rights and activity, co-responsibility in reproduction, economic cooperation, and co-residence. In a case where those we term "spouses" do not reside or take meals together, as among the Mundurucú (Murphy and Murphy 1974, Murphy 1959), the combination of sexual-reproductive rights and economic

interdependence that characterizes the relationship allows it to fall easily within our analytic category of "marriage."

Two contributors to this collection, Kensinger and Dole, do deal with the definition of marriage. Their respective approaches provide a good point of entry into the wider body of anthropological literature dealing with this question. Kensinger is concerned with developing an ethnographically adequate definition of marriage in Cashinahua society and a formulation that is appropriate for cross-cultural purposes. He sees the two tasks as complementary and relates them to one another in terms of the "emic"/"etic" framework, as developed by Goodenough and set out most clearly in Goodenough's general discussion of description and comparison (Goodenough 1970). However, unlike Goodenough, who suggests a single definition of marriage that will cover all ethnographic cases (1970:12-13), Kensinger suggests instead a repertoire of possible features that will be represented differentially in different cases, with perhaps no single feature being found in all (p. 245). Using Goodenough's own analogy, but one that Goodenough did not himself apply to the definition of marriage, Kensinger suggests that we should think of a cross-cultural approach to the definition of marriage as similar to having a phonetic alphabet that corresponds to the sound patterns of no particular language, but provides the basis for comparing them in terms of a range of possibilities.

Dole, on the other hand, feels that some universal, cross-culturally applicable definition of marriage is a prerequisite for cultural anthropological research. The definition she proposes, and that she has herself used for the Kuikuru, is "the socially sanctioned kinship union of two or more persons for the purpose of legitimizing their sexual relations or offspring. Any such union necessarily establishes jural affinal relations and is publicly recognized . . . " (p. 60).[22] In Dole's view, defining marriage in a particular society seems to be a matter of applying some descriptively adequate general definition.

These approaches can be referred to two general positions found in anthropological writings on the definition of marriage. One is represented by those anthropologists who maintain that any search for a single definition of marriage is misguided, since the institutions we have called by that term vary from one society to the next; this view is represented by Leach (1961), Needham (1971b, 1975), and Rivière (1971). Other anthropologists, feeling that the role relationships we term "marriage" in our descriptions of other societies have something in common, have sought to provide a definition that will establish what these common features are.

In order to evaluate what has been written from each of these perspectives, and to bring greater clarity to anthropological discussions of

the cross-cultural definition of marriage, it is important to distinguish among the following different questions and to address each separately:

1. Given the fact that we, as anthropologists, require some analytic language with which to describe and also to compare particular societies, can we make a principled choice about which set of culturally patterned relationships in a society's repertoire we will refer to, for comparative purposes, by the term "marriage"?

2. What is the relationship between a comparative definition of marriage that allows for such translation and an ethnographically adequate account of what constitutes "marriage" in a particular society?

3. Does the identification of certain general attributes of marriage necessarily imply an emphasis in comparative work on what all cases have in common? If not, how can we go about doing interesting and valuable work on the cross-culturally variable aspects of marriage?

The first question can and must be answered in the affirmative: we must be able to specify, with respect to comparative considerations, why we choose the label "marriage" for one kind of culturally patterned relationship and not for another. We cannot accept Rivière's position that marriage can only be defined as "one of the forms of relationship between the sexes," and that the question of "which of the forms of relationship between the sexes is, in any given society, to be regarded as the marital one . . . cannot be decided in advance" (Rivière 1971:65). Rivière claims that his approach is less problematic than it seems and that it works quite well in actual practice, since "it seems likely that anyone in any society will be able to tell the inquirer whether or not they are married (*assuming that the linguistic and terminological difficulty can be overcome*)" (1971:65; italics added). Clearly the clause in parentheses expresses the crux rather than the resolution of the problem. As Gough (1959:71) has pointed out, "unless we approach these [different kinds of relationships between men and women] with some guiding concepts of our own, we cannot decide which of them to translate as 'marriage.' " Rivière's own use of the term "marriage" in his monograph on the Trio (1969), his choice of which cross-sex bond to so label, depended not on features peculiar to this group of South American Indians but, rather, on comparative considerations he brought to his analysis.

Turning to the second question, on what basis can we use the comparative, analytic term "marriage" for the differing, culturally defined institutions of different societies? How can we formulate the relationship between the comparative definition and an ethnographically adequate definition of what constitutes "marriage" in a particular society? I maintain that our ability to apply the term "marriage" to a culturally defined class of relationships in a particular society rests on our being able to specify that that class *includes* relationships of a type that can be defined

cross-culturally, given that it may include other types of relationship as well; that the relationships in the class *include* features outlined in the general, comparative definition, given that they may include other features as well. I will explain more fully what I mean by this further on in my discussion. For now, let me just point out that when we approach the role relationships that form a category in a particular society, the category presents characteristics that are familiar to us from our cross-cultural experience. That is what enables us to make contact with the category and to make a principled choice of the analytic term by which we designate it. We will, however, need to invoke other considerations in order to come to terms with the category as it is formed in that society. What I am saying may seem self-evident; yet the fact is that anthropological debate on the definition of marriage has generally failed to maintain the necessary distinction between cross-cultural definitions and culture-specific categories, and to suggest a clear way of viewing the relationship between them.

As for the third question, the identification of cross-culturally recurrent features in the institutions we call "marriage" in no way implies that comparative research is a matter of finding lowest common denominators. Indeed, establishing universals or general recurrences is only a part of a larger enterprise that also involves addressing the patterning of cross-cultural variation.

Let us now consider some of the general definitions of marriage that have appeared in the anthropological literature. The most familiar and often-cited of these are the definition proposed by Murdock in *Social Structure* (1949) and the one found in *Notes and Queries in Anthropology* (sixth edition, 1951). According to Murdock, "... marriage exists only when the economic and sexual are united into one relationship, and this combination occurs only in marriage. Marriage, thus defined, is found in every known human society. In all of them, moreover, it involves residential cohabitation, and in all of them it forms the basis of the nuclear family" (1949:8). The 1951 edition of *Notes and Queries in Anthropology* defined marriage as "a union between a man and woman such that children born to the woman are recognized legitimate offspring of both parents."

Both of these definitions came under attack by anthropologists who maintained that they failed to cover particular cases, for example, the marriage patterns of the South Indian Nayar, where husband-wife and father-child ties are minimal, or the institution of woman-woman marriage found in a large number of African societies. If we look at lowland South America, we see that the Mundurucú, mentioned above, do not meet all of the criteria proposed in Murdock's definition.

In subsequent attempts at defining marriage, anthropologists sought to avoid these shortcomings and to arrive at formulations that would cover even the most problematic ethnographic cases. Thus Gough (1959: 32) defined marriage as "a relationship established between a woman and one or more other persons, which provides that a child born to the woman under circumstances not prohibited by the rules of the relationship, is accorded full birth-status rights common to normal members of his society or social stratum." Goodenough, seeking to improve on Gough's definition, which focused on legitimacy, proposed one that focused instead on sexual access, which Goodenough deemed more fundamental to the definition of marriage. According to Goodenough, marriage is "a transaction and resulting contract in which a person (male or female, corporate or individual, in person or by proxy) establishes a continuing claim to the right of sexual access to a woman—this right having priority over rights of sexual access others currently have or may subsequently acquire in relation to her (except in a similar transaction) until the contract resulting from the transaction is terminated—and in which the woman involved is eligible to bear children" (1970:12-13). The general orientation revealed in Goodenough's definition, as in many others, can be characterized as "bio-jural"; that is, a highly legalistic view of the conjugal bond is combined with a tendency to derive marriage directly from the "natural" facts of sex and reproduction. One point that should emerge from the following discussion is that such a formulation is more a reflection of how marriage is viewed in our own society than it is a satisfactory cross-cultural characterization of the marital relationship.

Both Gough and Goodenough were attempting to provide a general definition of marriage that could cover all cases, including those that appeared to constitute exceptions to earlier definitions. It seems, however, that that goal of covering all cases has been conceived in a less than satisfactory manner. What we want is a set of concepts that will allow us to establish comparative contact with all the societies we study; this does not mean that our concepts have to address the full range of practices found in each of these societies. As I shall show, our ability to identify the unions between women found in various African societies as "marriages" does not depend upon our having a cross-cultural definition of marriage that is itself broad enough to cover this ethnographic possibility; the existence of such unions does not necessitate a general revision of the definition of marriage along the lines envisaged by Gough and Goodenough. Goodenough's definition is, in any event, inappropriate to the forms of woman-woman marriage found in Africa, since these unions are hardly best understood in terms of "sexual access"; issues like rights in children and/or access to labor seem more to the point

(see, for example, Gough 1971 and Krige 1974). In more general terms, one might well ask why a comparative, cross-cultural definition should have to account for practices that are found in some societies and not in others.

Anthropological debate on the definition of marriage has been plagued by recurrent attempts to have general definitions account for phenomena that are best understood in culture-specific terms. To continue with the example of woman-woman marriage, since it is an interesting one and has received a considerable amount of attention in the literature, we might first note that this type of conjugal union is essentially limited in its occurrence to Africa, where it is quite common. This should lead us to inquire into what there is about kinship, marriage, and other areas of social life in those African societies in which woman-woman marriage is found that makes this institution both possible and meaningful. We might begin by noting the importance of exchanges of wealth, as opposed to sexual activity, in defining marital unions and legitimating rights in offspring. A cultural separation between biological and social paternity is a basic element in the kinship systems of societies in this region, and clearly a contributing factor to the possibility of woman-woman marriage and female fatherhood. Another major consideration is the salience of descent as a principle of social identity: a woman's status as member of a descent group may override her gender in determining the position she occupies. Finally, the very centrality of kinship to the role systems of African societies, combined with the other features just outlined, means that kinship can serve to express the social promotion of women to statuses normally occupied by men.[23]

The need for a culture-specific approach to patterns like woman-woman marriage can be seen even more clearly if we compare the African cases we have been considering to the question of homosexual marriage in our own society. While such unions are not currently recognized by law, many feel that they should be. If same-sex unions make sense to a certain segment of American society, it is certainly not for any of the same reasons that woman-woman marriage makes sense to the Nuer, Lovedu, Nandi, or Yoruba. In order to understand current arguments in favor of homosexual marriage, we must be aware of how the marital bond is viewed culturally, the kind of companionship it is felt to entail, and the role of sexual love in the union. We must also see how the question can be construed as a civil rights issue. Similarly, opposition to homosexual marriage from other segments of society must be analyzed with reference to cultural beliefs that heterosexuality and heterosexual marriage are rooted in nature or in divine will.[24]

Let me at this point suggest a basis for the cross-cultural identification

of "marriage" relationships and discuss how my own approach compares with the others I have been considering, including those presented in in this volume.

I propose that we may appropriately label "marriage" that class of relationships, defined as a category in a given society, that includes within it relationships having the following characteristics: that the partners be a man and a woman; that sexual activity be a defining feature of the relationship; that socially significant bonds be established between the partners and any offspring they may have (what anthropologists understand by "filiation"); that the union involve wider social ties between persons related to the respective partners (what anthropologists understand by "affinity"); and that the relationship be a part of the society's system of relations of production.

The component parts of this definition—a cross-sex bond, sexual activity, filiative bonds, affinal relationships, ties to the economic system—are themselves familiar from many other definitions, including the one presented in Dole's paper. I would, however, like to call attention to some points concerning the concepts of filiation and affinity, and to the nature of the relationship I am establishing between marriage and economic systems.

The concept of filiation, as I use it here, contains no assumptions about cultural theories of conception, an issue that is commonly raised in discussions of filiation and descent; it does not rest on beliefs about the physical transmission of substance from parent to child. Nor does the filiative tie between a man and his children necessarily involve a man's having some significant set of rights over or obligations to his children, a matter to which Goodenough has devoted attention (1970:27ff.). What is at issue is that the social identities of both partners in a sexual relationship are relevant to the social placement of children that are believed to be the outcome of such a relationship. As for relations of affinity, these need not be established as a result of the marriage; they may precede the marriage, as in the case of certain "alliance" systems described for Southeast Asia and elsewhere, or in the case of those lowland South American societies described in this volume whose systems of kin classification can appropriately be characterized as incorporating a positive marriage rule. The point is that whether affinal relationships are *presupposed* when a marriage takes place or whether they are *created* by that marriage (see note 10 below), the concept of affinity clearly depends upon the concept of marriage.[25]

The idea that marriage should be viewed from an economic perspective harks back to Murdock's definition. Murdock saw the economic dimension of marriage as a matter of the division of labor between the sexes in the context of the conjugal family. I prefer to see it in terms of

a link between sexual and reproductive relations and the wider socio-economic structures of a society. A system of economic relations involves the mobilization and channeling of sexual energies; the replication of roles within that system is tied to reproductive arrangements. The husband-wife pair need not themselves constitute a significant unit of production and consumption, though commonly they do. Their union will, however, express those social categories central to the society's system of relations of production, be they categories of rank, class, caste, lineage, or sex itself.

The definition of marriage I am presenting here differs from others less in its content than in how its range of application is formulated. In order for the term to apply, it is not necessary that all "marriages" in a particular society meet the criteria outlined above, only that the culturally defined class of relationships we, as anthropologists, translate by the comparative term "marriage" include relationships that do meet these criteria. We thus establish our point of comparative contact with the society we are studying by our ability to specify at least a subclass of relationships that fall within a cultural category we choose to label "marriage"; at the same time, we allow for the fact that other types of relationships may be part of that category as well. It is important to keep in mind that our ability to identify these other types of relationships as "marriage" itself depends on their membership in a wider class that we have been able to define with reference to the general definition.

The approach I am taking here posits *implicational* relationships between different forms of marital union: that is, the existence of certain types of marriage, or the identification of certain unions as "marriages," implies the prior existence, or prior identification, of other types of union. Inquiries into implicational relations, or implicational hierarchies, has been basic to typological comparative work in linguistics (Jakobson 1941, Greenberg 1966) and might profitably be considered by social anthropologists. In the study of marriage such an approach would help us to distinguish between universal and variable features, and might also bring more order into the study of those features that vary.

It is of interest to compare the concept of implicational relations with the respective approaches to the definition of marriage taken by Needham and Kensinger. Needham has claimed that the term "marriage" has been used to designate institutions that have no single feature in common. According to Needham, terms like "marriage" are what Wittgenstein called "odd-job" words: they do not designate a class constituted by some universally shared feature or features but are instead based on an overlapping of features, a set of serial resemblances—what Wittgenstein termed "family likenesses" (Needham 1971b:5, 29-30). Needham goes on to argue that this notion of "family likenesses" corresponds to what a

natural scientist calls a "polythetic," as opposed to "monothetic," class (1975).

Kensinger acknowledges that some features may prove to be common to all marriage systems, but plays down the significance of this possibility for a comparative approach, which he feels should address itself essentially to the complexity and variation among forms of marriage. He proposes an analogy with the International Phonetic Alphabet: a comparative, or "etic," approach to marriage should consist of developing "a matrix chart wherein various constellations of features can be identified" (p. 245). Kensinger's model has certain structural properties not found in Needham's, though these are not worked out in explicit detail by Kensinger here.

Comparing these two perspectives to the one I have adopted, I suggest that an approach that rests on implicational relations better accounts for how anthropologists are, in fact, proceeding when they do comparative research. I would go further and suggest that this may be the only way they can proceed. In any event, the discussion I have presented above would seem to show that Needham is incorrect when he asserts that the institutions we have labeled "marriage" have no single feature or features in common. The implicational relations model, moreover, has considerable potential as an ordering device in cross-cultural study. The emics/etics model used by Kensinger, while providing a basically sound general analogy for the process of comparative inquiry, also involves certain problems—a subject to which I shall return in a moment.

Both Kensinger's and Needham's discussions are productive insofar as they direct attention to comparison based not just on identity but on variation. It is interesting to note that Needham never followed up on this line of inquiry. The same observation can be made of Leach's (1951) earlier discussion of the definition of marriage; Leach presented a list of the different kinds of rights that marriage could serve to establish in different societies, but failed to pursue further any comparative investigation that might have been suggested by his own consideration of such varying features. Both Leach and Needham instead used variation as a point of departure for arguing the uselessness of all general definitions of marriage. The main reason for this is that both were concerned with dissociating themselves from traditional functionalist approaches in social anthropology in favor of structural analysis in the mode of Lévi-Strauss. What this amounted to was a search for relations of a highly abstract sort, that take the form of a "mathematical pattern" (Leach 1961:2), and that express the "logical and psychic facilities which are elementary resources available to all mankind in the ordering of experience" (Needham 1971b:32). Unfortunately, such an approach, whatever its merits, had problematic implications for comparative research that were not

unlike those of the functionalism it criticized: no matter where one went, one was essentially looking for the same thing.

One of the major problems with functionalist approaches was the uneasy and unclear relationship between natives' explanations of their own behavior and the analyst's interpretation of the social order. In Radcliffe-Brown's positivist view, society, or social structure, was a "concrete reality" that could be studied by "direct observation" ([1940] 1952: 190). The essential conflict between this objectivist perspective and the clearly normative approach that Radcliffe-Brown took to the study of social institutions went unrecognized and unresolved in his own work, as it did in that of his predecessor and major source of theoretical inspiration, Emile Durkheim.

In structuralist writings we find an equally disturbing disjunction between the "surface" phenomena recorded by the ethnographer and the "deep" structures that are said to constitute a society's most significant ordering principles. The result can be, once again, an obscure relationship between informants' understandings and the anthropologist's analysis. Rivière's discussion of the definition of marriage is a case in point. In the course of his exposition he criticizes an account by Christopher Crocker of two kinds of sexual union among the Bororo. Crocker had labeled one kind of union "marriage" and the other a "sexual liaison"; Rivière takes him to task for "simply expressing in Leach's terms the criteria which the Bororo themselves appear to employ in making [such] a distinction" (Rivière 1971:58). But is it not the very purpose of analytic distinctions to adequately account for the distinctions made by the people we study? This does not mean that anthropologists confine themselves to native theories of the social system, though such theories do constitute important social scientific data. It is rather the task of the anthropologist to penetrate beneath this more conscious, or ideological, level to get at the tacit and covert conventions that make action meaningful and interpretable.

Kensinger sees the ethnographer's task in essentially these terms. The ethnoscientific tradition within which he is working, however, presents some of the same difficulties as the approaches I have just been considering. If we look at Goodenough's work, for example, we can see an amalgam of a kind of functionalism similar to Malinowski's (or Murdock's) and a structural linguistic approach derived from phonemics, the same ultimate source of many Lévi-Straussian structuralist notions. Goodenough's functionalist orientation leads him to base his general definitions of institutions like marriage in "universal functions" that are defined with reference to biological needs and other "extra-cultural conditions" (1970: 122). His work is also characterized by a dualism that is reminiscent of the unresolved contradiction in Radcliffe-Brown's work, noted above. In Goodenough's case what we have is an opposition between "culture" and

"society," in which culture is viewed as a set of shared ideas that can be studied out of the context of social action, while society is, to use Goodenough's terms, "a material-behavioral system of interacting people and things" (1970:103) that is presumably amenable to "objective" study. In other words, we seem to be faced with a gulf between culture as an activity of the mind and society as mindless activity.

This same dualism is behind the emic/etic model of comparative research, as elaborated by Goodenough (1970) and adopted here by Kensinger. The "etic grids" used in comparison are based on an analogy with a phonetics defined in objective, physicalist terms. Paradoxically, this model, besides involving a problematic view of phonology (see Jakobson and Halle 1956), seeks to develop a "cultural semantics" by drawing on just that level of linguistic analysis that does not itself deal with meaning—an observation that is also relevant to the structuralist enterprise.[26] These assumptions may not all be a part of Kensinger's own use of the emics/etics model. Nonetheless, having defined his goal in terms of providing an "emic" analysis of Cashinahua marriage, Kensinger has difficulty relating the rich material on how Cashinahua talk about marriage, which takes up the major part of his paper, to the conclusions about underlying rules that inform Cashinahua behavior.[27] The emics/etics analogy also fails to provide guidance on how the legal and moral dimensions of marriage in particular societies are connected to a cross-cultural definition of the marital relationship (p. 245).

Another aspect of Kensinger's approach to marriage that grows out of his ethnoscientific orientation is his concern with discriminating between optional and obligatory features of marriage, and with arriving at a definition that will clearly distinguish between marriage and other kinds of relationships. The distinction between definitional and nondefinitional dimensions of marriage is indeed an important one. The question must, however, be approached in a dynamic and subtle manner. We want to consider the possibility that disagreements may exist within a society about what are, or should be, the defining attributes of the marital relationship.[28] Changes that occur over time in the social definition of marriage may be a matter of shifts between the obligatoriness and optionality of various of the relationship's attributes. In general, anthropologists interested in the cross-cultural study of marriage can benefit from the experience of linguists who have found that studying a pattern that is overt, formal, and obligatory in one grammatical system enables them to understand the operation of a similar pattern in another language in which it is relatively covert and less formalized. Finally, too rigid a distinction between definitional and nondefinitional aspects of marriage would leave us unable to address the networks of meaning that give

the marital relationship its distinctive cultural significance in any particular society.

The goal of defining marriage in a clear and unambiguous manner must be formulated more precisely and viewed in ethnographic perspective. Not all societies are themselves concerned with unambiguous distinctions between marriage and other forms of sexual union. On the contrary, ambiguity may play a central role in a marriage system (see, for example, Comaroff 1980). It may also be appropriate in some cases to speak of marriage as a matter of degree, as Murray (1976) points out in his description of marriage among the Basotho. One might, in fact, look at Cashinahua marriage in this light, based on the data provided by Kensinger. While Kensinger states that the Cashinahua make a clear distinction between marriages and affairs (pp. 243-44 and note 6), he also provides a tripartite classification of marriages in which one type ("Illegitimate-improper") so totally violates Cashinahua marriage rules that it would not be allowed to persist and another type ("Legitimate-improper") can perhaps be seen as somewhat less of a marriage than the remaining type ("Legitimate-proper") (pp. 240-42). The marriage Kensinger calls "Legitimate-improper" is a socially recognized albeit not approved union between a man and a woman that can form the core of a nuclear or polgynous family and may attach itself to other social units in the village. It may not, however, form the nucleus of what Kensinger calls an "atom of social organization," that is, a nexus of relationships that typifies the ordering principles of Cashinahua society. These marriages thus do not figure in the processes of social reproduction in the same way as "Legitimate-proper" marriages do, a distinction that refers us back to the general definition of marriage outlined above.

In the light of these considerations, it is possible to formulate in more precise terms what we should expect of a cross-cultural definition of marriage with respect to distinguishing between different types of union. The cross-cultural definition should enable us to make an analytically principled choice about which of the unions distinguished by the cultural system in question (insofar as such distinctions are in fact made) we will label "marriage." The choice will be guided by the features of the cross-cultural definition: the term "marriage" will be used for the type or types of sexual relationship most concerned with filiation, affinity, and economic ties (that is, with the process of reproducing the social and economic system). As Kensinger puts it at one point in his discussion, our definition should "allow us to discuss marriage in any society with as little ambiguity as possible, while conveying whatever ambiguity exists in the system itself" (p. 245).

The reason that anthropologists have tended to view the discrimination

between marriage and other sexual relationships as a relatively straightforward matter is that they themselves, for the most part, come from societies in which marriages are brought into being by a particular act or ceremony, be it civil or religious. The phrase "I now pronounce you man and wife," uttered in the course of a marriage ceremony (that is, by an authorized person, in an appropriate setting, when certain conditions have been met), constitutes what philosophers of language call a "performative," since it serves to bring into being a particular state of affairs, in this case a marriage. Marriages in lowland South American societies, on the other hand, are brought about in a different manner. Kensinger makes the very important point that marriage in Cashinahua society must be looked on as a process (pp. 222, 224, 244), a conclusion that emerges from a number of other articles in this collection, including those by Jackson, Sorensen, the Whittens, Kracke, and Crocker.[29] The exchanges associated with a marriage unfold over time, and the conjugal bond is established as couples sustain a particular kind of relationship with one another. Kracke (pp. 112-14) speaks of a simple wedding ceremony among the Kagwahiv, but it is clear that this ritual is not what brings the marriage into being. The Whittens (p. 210) note that the concept of cementing the affinal bond with a single ritual is foreign to Canelos Quichua culture. The group marriage ceremony described by Crocker for the Canela serves primarily to reinforce marriages that already exist (p. 70), and may be seen as having primarily to do with the age grading system that plays such a central role in the social organization of Gê peoples.[30]

With the perspectives provided by these ethnographic cases, we must reexamine Dole's general definition of marriage, which includes the proviso that there be some kind of "marriage act" (see note 22). According to Dole, the marital union must be "publicly recognized, if not acclaimed, by a customary act, even if that act is no more than moving one's hammock" (pp. 60-61). The essential point here is to be careful about the meaning of such acts. They may serve to indicate, or announce, that a marriage has taken place; they may provide the idiom in which members of the society commonly speak of a marital union having been established. This does not mean, however, that the social acts themselves bring the marital union into being, as a civil or religious ceremony does in our own society. In other words, the more general category of acts that bear some symbolic relationship to marriage must be distinguished from the narrower category of those that serve as performatives. Kensinger does well to note (p. 244) that a general definition of marriage should contain no assumption that marriage is necessarily an act, a covert assumption we might tend to make because of both our social norms and the properties of our language.

The marriage process in lowland South American societies does not generally involve special rituals or elaborate ceremonies. Given the kinds of socioeconomic systems involved and the lack of significant corporate group organization below the level of the community, marriage does not involve important and formalized transfers of rights over resources, property, and persons. Bride service, rather than bride wealth, is the general practice in the region, which accords with the processual nature of marriage. While relations of affinity are accompanied by relations of exchange, it is not generally exchange that serves to legitimate the marriage. The issue of legitimacy, particularly with respect to the legitimation of offspring, is itself not a central preoccupation. It is interesting to note that the concept of legitimacy figures in Kensinger's discussion of Cashinahua marriage not in connection with the status of offspring but in connection with how well a union adheres to the rules for the proper choice of spouse.

As noted above, the relationships that have been labeled "marriage" in the societies of lowland South America have seemed familiar enough not to have occasioned any problems in the application of the term. The definition of Cashinahua marriage proposed by Kensinger (p. 240)—involving cohabitation, a sexual relationship, and economic cooperation—closely parallels Murdock's (1949:8) definition of marriage quoted earlier. This definition seems a reasonable point of departure for characterizing marriage in lowland South American societies more generally. What we may now proceed to do is augment this definition through the kind of rich ethnography that has come increasingly to characterize South American studies in recent years, so that we may achieve a fuller understanding of the many meanings of marriage for societies in this part of the world.

NOTES

1. In addition to Lévi-Strauss's own writings, other relatively early key contributions to this body of literature include Leach (1951), Dumont (1953a, 1957), and Needham (1958).

2. In descriptions of these systems the term "kin" is used in two different ways: in its more general sense, it covers all classes that form part of the terminological system; when used more specifically, it refers to nonmarriageables only. Since I will want to consider the significance of this polysemous pattern as it figures in a native system of social classification (for example, that of the Kalapalo), I have thought it best to refrain from ambiguous usage in my own comparative discussion. I will therefore use the term "kin" in its broader sense and use the term "consanguine" for the more restricted category of non-affinal kin. I do not thereby imply any ideology of relationship based on shared blood or other physical substance.

3. Several of the groups represented in this collection fall outside the culture areal rubric adopted by Rivière and have different systems of classification; these groups include the Canela, Bororo, and Canelos Quichua. For a general discussion of Dravidian systems among Carib-speaking tropical forest societies, see Rivière (1977).

4. Kaplan's article in particular includes a discussion of affinal as opposed to consanguineal interpretations of Dravidian kin terms, and also contains critical comments on Scheffler's approach.

5. Scheffler himself has made this point repeatedly in his various writings (see, for example, 1977:873).

6. I do not wish to become involved here in the lengthy debate among alliance theorists concerning the terms "prescription" and "preference," but will confine myself to a couple of brief observations. A critical discussion of the prescription/preference debate can be found in Schneider (1965b), which covers the literature up to that point. See also Lévi-Strauss (1967:xvii-xxiii), Needham (1971a:lix-lxxxi; 1973), and Maybury-Lewis (1965). The distinction between "prescription" and "preference" is sometimes, but not always, seen as congruent to Lévi-Strauss's opposition between "mechanical" and "statistical" models (1953).

7. Buchler and Selby (1968:137-88) make this point in their discussion of the controversy over Dravidian terminologies.

8. That the structural analysis of kinship and marriage, as developed by Lévi-Strauss, deals only tangentially with the meaningful systems commonly understood by the anthropological concept of "culture" has been pointed out by Schneider and Boon (1974:802).

9. This concept of multiple exchange is an appropriate characterization of marriage systems in which a prohibition on marriage between relatives is combined with a set of preferences including sibling exchange, sibling polygamy, sororate, and levirate. Such a system is found throughout most of the North American Great Basin, for example (Shapiro, in press).

10. My use of the concepts of presupposition and creativity follows Silverstein's analysis of rules of language use (1976:33-35). The opposition can be applied to the analysis of kin terms: one can speak of a kin term as "presupposing" insofar as its use can be accounted for in terms of separate, preexisting criteria such as genealogical linkage or common membership in a social group; "creative" use of a kin term, on the other hand, itself serves to bring a particular relationship into being.

11. I will return to this point in greater detail below, when I take up the issue of how exchange and alliance can be understood in the societies described in this volume.

12. The Cashinahua have until recently been the only case of a Karieratype section system reported for South America. Another case, however, has been described in Melatti's (1977) preliminary ethnographic study of the Marubo, who live near the Brazil-Peru border at the headwaters of the Itui and Curaça rivers. In this system an individual belongs to the same named section as his or her maternal grandmother.

13. According to Dole, the current pattern of cousin terminology among the Kuikuru is purely generational. I will return to this point in a moment when I take up the question of historical change.

14. He later claimed that he had no particular interest in most of the issues raised in the debate over the meaning of "prescription" (Lévi-Strauss 1967: xvii-xxiii; see note 6 above). Both Leach (1970:105) and Needham (1971a: xcii) have noted problems in how we are to understand Lévi-Strauss's distinction between elementary and complex structures.

15. Dole's (p. 54) observations about the narrow effective scope of the cross versus parallel distinction in Kuikuru terminology may also mean that the pattern of extensions shows Iroquois rather than Dravidian features, which would accord with the absence of a positive marriage rule.

16. This problem is discussed by Needham (1974), who presents and reanalyzes Suárez's account of historical changes in the marriage system and kin classification of the Warao of Venezuela (Suárez 1971, 1972).

17. Problems in applying alliance models in lowland South America involve the question of how descent can be understood in this part of the world—a topic that is beyond the scope of this essay. The examination of descent constructs in lowland South America was the subject of a symposium at the 74th annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association (Descent in Lowland South America 1975, Shapiro and Hunderfund n.d.). The papers given by Murphy and Shapiro in that symposium raise some general comparative considerations. For discussion and debate concerning the role of patrilineal descent in one South American Indian society, the Yanomama, see Shapiro (1972:72-74, 95-102, 197; 1974), Ramos (1972), Taylor and Ramos (1975), Ramos and Albert (1977), and Lizot (1977).

18. A similar point has been made by Townsend and Adams (1973) in their discussion of marriage exchange among the Culina of eastern Peru: strict accounts are kept with regard to exchange outside the village, while within the community there is not the same concern for achieving precisely balanced exchanges.

19. Also relevant to this issue is Kensinger's observation (p. 231) that Cashinahua women reckon their moiety affiliation not through their fathers directly but through relationship to a genealogically more distant female relative.

20. See Shapiro (1981) for a discussion of this issue and references to some of the literature on male bias in anthropology.

21. The argument I am presenting here is developed at greater length and in more detail in an essay entitled "Marriage as a Comparative Concept." Copies of this manuscript, which has been submitted for publication, can be obtained from the author.

22. The passage continues with "if not acclaimed, by a customary act, even if that act is no more than moving one's hammock." The question of what Dole, here following Ackerman, refers to as the "marriage act" will be taken up below.

23. For ethnographic data and analytic perspectives on these points, see

Gough (1971), Krige (1974), O'Brien (1977), Oboler (1980), and Shapiro (1979:283-84).

24. For an analysis of American concepts of kinship that are relevant to this issue, see Schneider (1968). Rosenthal (1979) provides a legal perspective on homosexual marriage that is also culturally revealing.

25. The attempt on the part of alliance theorists to shift emphasis from the conjugal pair to wider marital exchange relations has led to occasional analytic confusion on this issue (see, for example, Leach 1955).

26. I am indebted to Michael Silverstein for my understanding of these points and also for introducing me to the concept of implicational hierarchies. Silverstein's analyses of the ethnoscientific literature have so far been presented primarily in unpublished lectures, but some of the general points are treated in Silverstein (1976).

27. Part of the problem is a covert shift in focus from the classification of marriages to the discrimination between unions that are considered true marriages and those that are not. (I shall be taking up this latter question below.) In more general terms, the ethnoscientific tradition within which Kensinger is operating, based as it is on equating meaning with reference and cultural knowledge with a classification of objects according to their properties, limits Kensinger's ability to appreciate the data he has himself collected on the "pragmatics" of classifying marriage—that is, how classification may depend on features of the social situation in which classification is taking place rather than on features of the marriages being classified. For a general discussion of these issues, see Silverstein (1976). Ethnographic analyses that shed particular light on the limitations of the ethnoscientific method include Schneider (1965a) and Moerman (1971).

28. Rivière seems to find the existence of such differing views about marriage troublesome (1971:59); on the contrary, inquiries into intracultural variation should be central to the ethnographic enterprise and are an intrinsic part of the study of social change, something that functionalist approaches, as Rivière himself points out (1971:59), have never been able to address.

29. Carter's (1977) discussion of Andean marriage is also relevant here; according to Carter, the use of the term "trial marriage" by ethnographers reflects an inability to appreciate the processual nature of marriage in this region. The importance of viewing marriage in certain societies as a process has been emphasized by a number of Africanist ethnographers (see, for example, Roberts 1977, Comaroff and Roberts 1977, Comaroff 1980).

30. The Canela ceremony may be compared with the group marriage ceremony described by Maybury-Lewis for the Akwẽ-Shavante, in which an entire age set is married at once to girls some of whom are still toddlers (1967:79-80). These marriages may or may not endure; the ceremony itself follows an initiation and marks the passage of the age set into a new grade.