EVELYN BLACKWOOD
Purdue University

Wedding bell blues:

Marriage, missing men, and matrifocal follies

ABSTRACT
In this article, I revisit debates about so-called matrifocal societies as a way to critique the centrality of heteronormative marriage and family in anthropology. Using gender as a tool of analysis, I argue that anthropologists have relied on the trope of the dominant heterosexual man, what I call the "Patriarchal Man," to create and sustain concepts of "marriage" and "family." By examining the discourse on matrifocality in studies of Afro-Caribbean and Minangkabau households, I show how it is the "missing man," the dominant heterosexual man, who is the key to the construction and perpetuation of the matrifocal concept and, by extension, the motor of marriage, family, and kinship. This fixity on the dominant heterosexual man has led anthropologists to misrecognize other forms of relatedness as less than or weaker than heteronormative marriage. I suggest that, rather than positing a foundational model for human sociality, intimacy, or relatedness, researchers look for webs of meaningful relationships in their historical and social specificity. [*marriage, matrifocality, gender, kinship, matriliny, Afro-Caribbean, Minangkabau*]

Marriage was instituted at Creation.

—Baptist minister at a wedding ceremony (Portland, Oregon, July 2002)

Once viewed by anthropologists as the heart of kinship, marriage has been relegated to the status of a quaint custom relevant to particular societies, rather than to universal truths.[1] But as the epigraph above indicates, not everyone outside (or inside) anthropology has heard the news. Bringing sociological and theological views into alliance, many religious conservatives in the United States believe heterosexual marriage is their last bastion of hope in a decaying world. The more lesbians and gay men demand the right to marry, the more conservatives enshrine marriage in glowing terms as a sacred bond between a man and a woman.

Such attitudes translate directly into the current alarm about an apparent increase in female-headed, or woman-headed, households (I prefer the second term, although both are problematic as universal categories of household). Especially since 1965, when Daniel Patrick Moynihan declared the woman-headed family structure of African Americans a self-perpetuating "tangle of pathology" (United States Department of Labor 1981:47), policy makers have viewed such households with suspicion. Research on woman-headed households worldwide in the latter part of the 20th century seems to suggest that this suspicion is well founded. A review of the literature found that "female-headed households are common in situations of urban poverty; in societies with a high level of men's labour migration; and in situations where general insecurity and vulnerability prevail" (Moore 1988:63). International news headlines in the past five years have broadcast unease over the rapid increase in numbers of these households and in the poverty associated with them.

Anxieties about this apparent trend have prompted a renewed exploration, primarily outside of anthropology, for the "causes" of and "solutions" to woman-headed households. But what are these households, and why are they the focus of so much concern? Is it the poverty of these households

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that is truly of concern, or is it the absence of a dominant heterosexual man that underlies the near hysteria about woman-headed households? By maligning these households, are pundits and policy makers securing the status of heteronormative marriage and masculine agency? To address these issues, I explore anthropology's role in creating and sustaining heteronormative marriage and family. I use the term *heteronormative* here to refer to the normative status of a marital unit containing a dominant heterosexual man, a wife, and children. I revisit debates about so-called matrifocal societies to show how the trope of the dominant heterosexual man creates and sustains concepts of marriage and family, thereby making other forms of relatedness secondary, derivative, or nonnormative.

Kinship and marriage revisited

Debates about kinship and marriage are not new to anthropology.[2] Some anthropologists might even consider kinship itself to be a dead issue, a point with which I and many others in critical kinship studies would disagree.[3] In fact, despite the long struggle to denaturalize and deconstruct kinship, not all anthropologists would cede the point that marriage is an anthropological relic. As one example, in his overview of kinship, Ladislav Holy (1996) expresses a determined fondness for the importance of marriage in creating kinship. Although admitting that Claude Lévi-Strauss's model of marriage as an exchange of women is no longer tenable, he declares that "[Lévi-Strauss's] more general view that kinship perpetuates itself only through specific forms of marriage is incisive" (Holy 1996:37), thus reinforcing the centrality of marriage within kinship and culture. As John Borneman (1996) points out in his critical review of the institution, marriage still maintains paradigmatic status within ethnology and anthropology.

Borneman's work has challenged anthropologists to subject marriage and family to renewed critique. Demonstrating the ways that representations of marriage have created forms of inclusion and exclusion, Borneman seeks with broad strokes to displace marriage "as the definitive ritual and universally translatable regulative ideal of human societies" (1996:215). His thought-provoking critique incorporates important insights from queer theory to destabilize the dualism of married–unmarried. He argues that

> we must create a framework that allows for recognition of a proliferation of forms of sexual expression and intimacy as well as arguments for their public legitimation. We might begin by recognizing how marriage obtains its exact and privileged place in the replication of our present order only by means of foreclosures and erasures of relations that resist facile, heteronormative symbolization. [Borneman 1996:231]

In Borneman's figuration, marriage is defined in opposition to those individuals it forecloses or erases, that is, unmarried, noncohabiting persons of various sexualities. He seeks to replace marriage with "forms of sexual expression and intimacy," in particular, caring and being cared for (Borneman 2001). This is a critically important move for anthropologists but one that I argue must be tempered with a gendered analysis of the masculinist assumptions that lie behind marriage.

Borneman's critique of marriage addresses the normative status of heterosexuality and heteromarriage as whole constructs. His view of marriage is less concerned with the relations between the individuals within the condition of marriage. As feminist anthropology has shown, however, marriage is a deeply gendered institution. Marriage may stand in a particular relation of exclusion to nonmarriage, but gendered relations make the categories and experience of being married and unmarried different for men and women, just as they differ across classes and ethnic groups. As with other social practices, marriage in its particular instances is inflected by and shot through with particular processes and practices of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and nationality. Men and women, people of color, heterosexuals, and homosexuals have different places within the contrasting pair of married–unmarried. What happens, for instance, when the category "unmarried" is gendered or raced? In terms of their gendered implications, words such as *bachelor* and *spinster,* as used in the United States, have very different resonances. Whereas *bachelor* connotes freedom and sexual promiscuity, *spinster* connotes loneliness, lack of sexual partners, and nonreproductivity. Because of these differences, a critique of marriage must also attend to the theoretical assumptions about the heterosexual conjugal couple that solidify their status as the normative form of family.

Feminist anthropology has provided the groundwork for such an analysis, which I develop here to pursue a gendered critique of marriage. My use of gender as a conceptual lens is meant to show how heterosexual men and women are differently situated within the normative construct of "marriage." I am not claiming that gender, ethnicity, or sexuality is prior to marriage, a point that Borneman (1996) asserts in critique of feminist anthropology. I do not see any of these concepts, including "marriage," as foundational or originary but as constituted, deployed, and resisted in particular historical and social contexts.

I offer a critique of marriage by revisiting the discourses and theoretical assumptions associated with so-called matrifocal societies, precisely those societies in which marriage and the heterosexual conjugal couple were said to be "weak."[4] Using gender as a tool of analysis to examine the anthropological construction of matrifocality, I argue that anthropologists have relied on the trope of the dominant

heterosexual man to create and sustain concepts of "marriage" and "family." I provide a brief overview of the masculinist bias of structural–functionalist theories of kinship and marriage and their feminist critiques. Then, by examining the discourse on matrifocality in studies of Afro-Caribbean and Minangkabau households, I show how it is the "missing man," the dominant heterosexual man, who is the key to the construction and perpetuation of the matrifocal concept and, by extension, the motor of marriage, family, and kinship. I argue that, despite an ongoing critique of marriage and family, the concept of "marriage" continues to operate as a discourse to devalue, denormalize, and negate other forms of relatedness in which men are absent or ancillary.

Kinship's originary wedding story

In the formulation developed by structuralist anthropologists, marriage is minimally composed of husband and wife. This definition was based on the assumption, as David Schneider (1984) points out, that marriage is a vehicle for human sexual reproduction. Starting with the minimal conjugal unit of man and woman, classic kinship theory then claimed that the concept of the family lay at the heart of kinship. A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, Robert Lowie, and Bronsilaw Malinowski were unanimous "in allotting pride of place to the family as the matrix of kinship institutions" (Fortes 1969:66). Radcliffe-Brown (1952) claimed that the interlocking of elementary families formed kinship (see also Goody 1976). Because the family, or the apparently biological facts of parentage, seemed a fairly obvious starting place to these theorists, debate centered not on the composition of the family, but on the way genealogical connections were activated in kinship relations.

Several recent, excellent studies have recapitulated and assessed the development of theories of kinship and marriage from the time of Lewis Henry Morgan until the late 20th century.[5] Rather than provide yet another review of this history, I offer a brief discussion of the conceptual development of marriage and family within kinship theory. I review Lévi-Strauss's contention concerning the origins of kinship advanced in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1969) as a way to highlight the originary status of masculine heterosexuality in his theory. My analysis owes as much to Gayle Rubin's (1975) seminal work as to Judith Butler's line of reasoning in *Gender Trouble* (1990). Other critics have made arguments similar to mine, but I emphasize the way anthropologists created the trope of the dominant heterosexual man, what I call the "Patriarchal Man," as an explanation for systems of marriage and family. I am not the first, nor will I be the last, to use this term, but by capitalizing it I want to draw attention to its status as a cultural representation. "Patriarchal Man" is an artifact of Western narratives of culture that has driven theory far beyond the actual lives of many men in many places. I am not suggesting that men (with a small "m") are not dominant in particular cases within or across households, villages, or nations. Rather, I use this trope to demonstrate that the unmarked category "man" is always already dominant and heterosexual.

Lévi-Strauss's alliance theory is one of the more influential originary stories of kinship.[6] In seeking the processes underlying kinship structures, Lévi-Strauss gave preeminence to the incest taboo as the first necessary step in the formation of kinship. According to Lévi-Strauss, it is men who learn to give up their natural incestuous desires for women and, then, groups of men who create pacts with one añother to exchange their women in marriage, making reciprocity between men the first social act. Further, it is men's heterosexual desire that must be controlled, making original, "natural" sexuality heterosexual and masculine. Men's now culturally legitimized heterosexuality forms the basis of kinship and alliance. Kinship's originary masculinist tale situates men as the central actors in the drama not only of kinship but also of culture, a situation that Susan McKinnon has felicitously termed the "paternity of culture" (2001:277).[7]

In Lévi-Strauss's formulation, men's ability to gain sexual access to women is never questioned. As Butler notes, these discursive constructions "are nowhere accounted for but everywhere assumed within this founding structuralist frame" (1990:43). For Lévi-Strauss, the social facts of kinship are naturalized by asserting a primordial origin for masculine heterosexual dominance. As in other narratives of origin, this story appears to be the outgrowth of the "facts of life" and thus free from human social agency, giving it the appearance of universality (see Schneider 1984; Yanagisako and Delaney 1995).

By peeling away the presumptions embedded in Lévi-Strauss's originary story, what is revealed at the core of kinship and social structure is an original (natural, incestuous) masculine heterosexuality and masculine agency. Theorizing women's sexuality in this masculinist tale was not necessary. In Lévi-Strauss's view, men must be joined in marriage to women, who are there to fulfill the childbearing potential of their bodies.[8] Butler notes that the "construction of reciprocal exchange between men presupposes a nonreciprocity between the sexes ... as well as the unnameability of the female, the feminine, and lesbian sexuality" (1990:41).[9] Women, as sexual and reproductive vessels, are the essential objects of exchange and thereby lack true agency. Rubin defines this relationship in the following manner: "If it is women who are being transacted, then it is the men who give and take them who are linked, the woman being a conduit of a relationship rather than a partner to it" (1975:174). Rubin

sees this scenario resulting in compulsory heterosexuality and the oppression of women; other ramifications are also apparent.

Kinship does not simply enforce compulsory heterosexuality. As Butler (2002) argues, it is always already heterosexual. Yet it is not the heterosexual bond between a woman and a man that is envisioned in Lévi-Strauss's theory but a dominant masculine heterosexuality. In creating the story of originary sexuality that drives men to form alliances through marriage exchange, Lévi-Strauss's theory works to stabilize normative masculine heterosexuality and its product, the conjugal bond, while rendering other forms of relationship unthinkable. The consequence of masculine heterosexuality is that marriage, by definition, becomes the prerogative of men. Although Ward Goodenough later refigured marriage as a transaction or contract granting rights of sexual access to a woman by *either* a man or another woman, the ideal state of marriage remained one in which men held "proprietary interest" (1970:22). Thus, the dominant heterosexual man became the central trope of kinship theory. It was the Patriarchal Man who was envisaged as activating and controlling kinship and family. It is his shadow that continues to trouble debates about kinship and marriage.

Feminist challenges to classic kinship theory

Schneider's (1984) work was pivotal in bringing about the demise of structural–functionalist theories of kinship. By demonstrating that kinship theories reflected Euro-American concepts of "kinship" and "family," rather than biological "facts," he opened the door for a radical deconstruction of kinship, ultimately severing kinship from its genealogical roots. Drawing in part on his analysis, feminist anthropology has raised a number of critiques of kinship theory, addressing questions of power and inequality in kinship, marriage, and family.

Marriage and family were closely tied together in feminist revisions. Following Rubin, early critiques sought to understand the various forms of women's subordination wrought by kinship and marriage. Michelle Rosaldo's analysis located the potential for women's freedom from oppression in gender-egalitarian marriages, in which "men themselves help to raise new generations by taking on the responsibilities of the home" (1974:42). Eleanor Leacock historicized the institution of marriage by showing that, among the Montagnais-Naskapi, women and men had been equal partners in marriage until colonial interference by the Jesuits: "Indeed, independence of women was considered a problem to the Jesuits, who lectured the men about 'allowing' their wives sexual and other freedoms and sought to introduce European principles of obedience" (1981:35). Building on Sylvia Yanagisako's argument that "families are undeniably about more than procreation and socialization" (1979:199), Jane Collier et al. (1982) and, later, Rayna Rapp (1987) made key arguments that demonstrated the social construction of families.

Collier et al. soundly refuted the idea that "The Family" is a universal human institution, arguing that "families—like religions, economies, governments, or courts of law—are *not* unchanging but the products of various social forms" (1982:32). By showing the link between a bounded modern family (of conjugal pair plus children) and the modern state, they demonstrated that

> families do not exist everywhere. ... One can, *in nonstate social forms,* find groups of *genealogically* related people who interact daily and share material resources, but the contents of their daily ties, the ways they think about their bonds and their conception of the relationship between immediate "familial" links and other kinds of sociality, are apt to be different. [Collier et al. 1982:33, emphasis added]

Although Collier et al.'s recognition of the historically contingent nature of families made imagining many other sorts of families possible, two things operate here to limit the potential of their critique. First, even though non-kin are imagined as being able to join families "as if kin" (Collier et al. 1982:32), families or kin groups are defined as "genealogically related" individuals. Second, in arguing so clearly that a modern family of spouses and children is closely tied to a market society divided into public and private spheres, they left little room for other types of intimate relationships found in "modern" society.

Yanagisako and Collier's 1987 essay on gender and kinship marked a turning point in feminist analyses of kinship. Drawing close parallels with Schneider's critique of kinship, they removed the vestiges of the genealogical grid from their own work and pushed anthropologists to question the core symbols and meanings of any cultural system of kinship. Most tellingly, they argued that "the next phase in the feminist reanalysis of gender and kinship should be to question the assumption that 'male' and 'female' are two natural categories of human beings" (Collier and Yanagisako 1987a:7). This statement buttressed feminist arguments that biology (in this case, human reproductive potential) was not destiny. Yanagisako and Collier pushed this argument further by declaring that "there are no 'facts,' biological or material, that have social consequences and cultural meanings in and of themselves" (1987:39), thereby asserting that gender, as a way of thinking about bodies, lacks any predetermined or presocial meanings. I take this assertion to be a radical call to refuse all categories of gender and kinship, one that asks anthropologists first

to understand how it is that categories, subjectivities, and identities are created, maintained, and transformed in historically specific contexts.[10]

This radical critique of gender and kinship has been advanced in several areas in feminist and queer anthropology.[11] Certain key works use examples of "nonbiological" kin to underscore the social constructedness of kinship.[12] Developments in lesbian, gay, and transgender studies in anthropology underscore the potential for movement beyond binary notions of gender and sexuality.[13] One of the disadvantages with studies that focus on "other" forms of sexualities and families, however, is that such accounts have not completely destabilized heteronormative models of kinship. On the one hand, other forms of family, such as same-sex couples and their children, can seem reassuringly like normative nuclear families in their patterns of pairing and householding. On the other hand, they can be neatly excluded as subcultural phenomena outside the main cultural currents of investigation. I am not suggesting that feminist and queer anthropological work does not offer a challenge to heteronormative kinship, but its relatively subdued impact thus far may speak more to the ability of such challenges to be absorbed within mainstream models of kinship.

Another innovative area of critical kinship studies lies in the work on reproductive technologies and biogenetics.[14] This work emphasizes the knowledge practices that legitimize biological facts inhering in new reproductive technologies and new genetics (Franklin 2001; Strong 2002). Studies on surrogacy and reproductive technologies offer a strong challenge to Western assumptions about the biological bases of kinship, creating greater space for social parenthood. Yet the scholarly attention to and legal recognition of married couples and their strategies to achieve offspring implicitly reinforce the Western heteronormative family. In fact, as Kath Weston notes, recent years have seen "a gravitation back toward European and U.S. constructions of relatedness (as evidenced, for example, in the attention given procreation and parent-child ties)" (2001:152). In addition, despite feminist anthropology's apparent success in denaturalizing kinship and gender, in many ways new kinship studies continue the old dialogue with biology. As Thomas Strong (2002) notes, new biogenetic studies are actually bringing "nature" back in through research on genetic testing and disease risk. Having taken for granted the social constructedness of kinship, much feminist work is returning to the shifting intersections of the biological and the social.

Other areas of engagement that might redress the paradigmatic status of heterosexual marriage and the heterosexual couple (whether reproductive or nonreproductive) have been less traveled. Rather than looking at "other" forms of marriage or kinship, I return the focus to the heterosexual couple as a way to decenter heteronormative marriage and family in anthropology. In the following discussion, I revisit the discourses and debates about matrifocality to explore the hidden assumptions behind the problem of "weak" marriage.

The missing man in matrifocality

The literature on so-called matrifocal societies describes matrifocality generally as a situation in which marriage is "weak." In this article, I focus on two geographical areas in which the term *matrifocality* is used, the Afro-Caribbean region, which is neither culturally homogeneous nor unchanging but has served as the testing ground for early attempts to conceptualize matrifocality, and West Sumatra, Indonesia, an area where I conducted research on the matrilineal practices of the Minangkabau. In the Afro-Caribbean context the term was coined generally to mark woman-headed households. The label "matrifocal" was applied to some matrilineal societies, particularly by Nancy Tanner (1974) in her efforts to make sense of a wide range of kinship practices in which women were focal. Matrilineal societies were said to be "puzzles" because of the impermanence of the conjugal bond and the husband's subordination to the mother's brother (see Schneider and Gough 1961), a point I discuss in the next section.

In the years since it was first used by Raymond Smith in the Afro-Caribbean context, the term *matrifocality* has spawned a whole new topical domain. Smith used the term *matrifocal* "to convey that it is women *in their role as mothers* who come to be the *focus* of relationships, rather than head of the household as such" (1996:43).[15] Unlike Smith, Tanner defined matrifocality as a situation in which women, as mothers, have "economic and political power within the kin group" (1974:132). The debates that raged over the definition of matrifocality subsided in the 1980s, allowing the concept to slink off the stage with certain issues unresolved. The failure to come to terms with some of the presumptions behind the concept have allowed it to be resurrected in the term *female-headed,* or *woman-headed, households.* Woman-headed households have achieved renewed importance, albeit negatively, as a supposed source of poverty in the era of global capitalism.[16] Although matrifocal and woman-headed households are distinguished analytically in the literature, the first term readily slides conceptually into the second because both types include households in which men are supposedly missing. The term *woman-headed household* is usually reserved for households in which men, as husbands, are absent, not just marginal, as they are said to be in matrifocal households (see Geisler 1993). I do not distinguish between these two terms here because the same assumptions underlie both concepts.

Studies of working-class Afro-Caribbean families in the 1950s and 1960s attempted to classify the forms of households and kin groupings practiced there. Of primary concern in these studies was the form and durability of the conjugal unit. Equally important was the effort to ascertain why so many women were heads of households. A range of terms was concocted to identify the various forms of heterosexual relations found among Afro-Caribbean families. In his early work, Raymond Smith (1956) identified 11 forms. Other researchers devised additional terms, but the more common designations used, in addition to *married, single, widowed,* and *divorced,* were *common-law marriage, stable unions, visiting unions,* and *casual relationships,* each marking the permanence or impermanence of relationship between the woman designated as head and a man.[17] The relationships were also described as being unstable or in constant flux. Explanations for women's position as household head were attributed primarily to men's absence because of labor migration or poor and unstable economic conditions.[18] Because of their assumptions about the normative family, researchers turned to the mother as the focal point for definition of the matrifocal "family." Relationships within matrifocal households were defined according to their genealogical connection to the putative head, even when other forms of relationship were present in these households.

Feminist critiques pointed out how these representations of Afro-Caribbean households relied on an assumption of the universality of the (Western) nuclear family and the normality of middle-class marriage with a stable husband provider (see Barrow 1996; Olwig 1981). By attending to the diversity of households in Afro-Caribbean communities, they demonstrated the uselessness of labels such as "matrifocality" as a descriptor for one region, let alone all of the Afro-Caribbean region with its multiplicity of histories and cultures. Feminist researchers documented households shared by two adult kinswomen (sisters or mother and daughter) and their children (Barrow 1986), by consanguineal units of related kin (Gonzalez 1984), and by adult kinswomen with kinsmen and close women friends who were regularly present (see Bolles 1996; Monagan 1985). Carol Stack's (1974) work on urban African American households is also instructive in this regard. Stack was the first anthropologist to argue against the "pathology" label used by Moynihan (United States Department of Labor 1981) to describe U.S. households headed by African American women. She argued that, because Moynihan's data were based on census statistics, they failed to accurately reflect African American domestic organization. She illustrated the vitality and flexibility of extended-kin relations in these households, which were typically three-generation units that shifted over time and included members who were not always physically present. These findings underscore the critical importance of networks of kinswomen, related men, and friends, within and across households, in the constitution and viability of families and households (see also Shimkin et al. 1978).

Given the debates about matrifocality and the demonstrated complexity of relationships found in supposedly matrifocal societies, what has happened to the term? In her review of Caribbean studies in the mid-1980s, Patricia Mohammed found that the term has a multiplicity of meanings.

> Matrifocality may imply that women in a society have a "rather good" status generally, or that they may have more control over income and expenditure; in another context it may refer to a situation where women are the primary earners in the household. Elsewhere it may refer to those societies where male absenteeism leads to a predominance of households headed by women. [1986:171–172]

According to the *Dictionary of Anthropology,* matrifocal households are "structured around the mother and ... the father is absent or plays a relatively limited role" (Barfield 1997:313). Drawing on Raymond Smith's work, Holy defines a matrifocal family as a "fleeting and tenuous relationship between a man and a woman and her children ... in the Caribbean in which women and their children form the core of many households. A man may be attached to the woman only temporarily, usually as her lover but not necessarily as a 'father' to her children" (1996:310). In one ethnographic study, *matrifocality* was used to signify broadly a temporary situation in which kinswomen and nearby women neighbors visit, share food, and work closely together while the men are away on a trade expedition (see Rasmussen 1996).[19]

What continues to be either implicit or explicit in these definitions is the failed heterosexual couple with its missing man. In Mohammed's recitation of definitions, the unspoken is the object of comparison: "[Women] may have more control over income and expenditure" than their husbands or absent men partners or temporary men partners; "[matrifocality] may refer to a situation where women are the primary earners in the household" as opposed to a situation in which men are the primary earners. Matrifocality seems to be irrecoverably associated with the absence of men. These definitions suggest a longing for the absent man, the one who should be the primary earner, the one in control and in charge—in fact, the Patriarchal Man.

Although ostensibly about women, the concept of "matrifocal households" is an ongoing conversation about the "missing" man. Matrifocal households were identified and designated as nonnormative forms of

household because of the absence not just of a permanent married heterosexual couple but, more precisely, the absence of a *husband*. And, yet, much of the research in the 1980s and 1990s on working-class black and Afro-Caribbean families clearly showed that these families were groups of kin and close friends that included men and were not defined by the entry or exit of a man in a heterosexual relationship. According to Stack (1974), households changed because of births and deaths within the kin group. In fact, in Afro-Caribbean households married couples might be present as well as unmarried heterosexual couples. Some three-generational households in Stack's (1974) study included grandmother and grandfather; in many cases the grandfather was not the father of all of his spouse's children.

So, if there were reproductive heterosexual couples, even of limited duration, and fathers who had ongoing contact with their children in these kin groupings, why the concern over these families? It was not only the loss of the normative heterosexual family of coresiding man, woman, and children but also the absence of the Patriarchal Man, classic kinship theory's dominant heterosexual man, that led researchers to regard matrifocal families as nonnormative. Rather than recognizing and valuing the actual relationships in these households, this narrative of loss sought to explain only why men, as husbands, were not the providers and heads of these households. Even many feminist researchers, including Stack, evinced concern about the "weak" position of black men in matrifocal families.[20] The hidden presumption was that men not only should be present but also dominant within the family. The concern for men's "weakness" or absence in matrifocal families, despite men's presence and active heterosexual relationships, derives explicitly from classic kinship theory's expectation that men should have control of women and children. The concept of "matrifocality" created a type of household and kin relationship that foreclosed other possibilities by continually turning attention to the missing Patriarchal Man.

In fact, what also turns up missing because of the trope of the Patriarchal Man is men in forms of relatedness other than that of heterosexual dominance. As the Afro-Caribbean literature from the 1970s on indicates, men were always present in these families, as adult sons, boyfriends, brothers, fathers, stepfathers, uncles, and friends. The concept of the "black extended family" (Shimkin et al. 1978) or the "kin-based household grouping" (Stack 1974), which included kinsmen and friends, was clearly articulated by researchers but failed to dislodge the centrality of the heteronormative family.[21] Stack notes that "the cooperation between male and female siblings who share the same household or live near one another has been underestimated" (1974:104).[22] Men in these kin networks cooperated with and assisted in the economic and social lives of their kin, but they were neither dominant nor decision makers. Few stories have been told about these men's lives because they have been viewed as failures, as men who did not attain the patriarchal norm. Consequently, anthropology's study of men and masculinity has yet to attend to the diversity of men's gender relations.[23]

Not surprisingly, when women's sexuality "strayed" from the heterosexual, it was also attributed to the missing man. Studies from the 1950s and 1960s drew on the legacy of classic kinship theory's presumptive masculine heterosexuality to marginalize relationships between women. M. G. Smith mentions only in passing that lesbianism is "partially institutionalized" in Carriacou, where "women who practice such homosexual relations are referred to in the French patois as madivines or zami" (1962:199, 200). His informants told him that madivines could be married or unmarried, generally had heterosexual relations, as well, and were often mothers. Smith comments that women were likely to establish relations with other women "during their husband's absence overseas" (1962: 199). Smith's assumptions echo Yehudi Cohen's (1953) earlier analysis of Jamaican women's interpersonal relationships. Cohen claimed that, according to informants, once heterosexual opportunities appear, the homosexual partners are discarded. Relying on a heterosexual deprivation theory, both Smith and Cohen assumed that same-sex practices would occur only in instances of deprivation of the other sex.[24]

The presence of women in same-sex relationships in Afro-Caribbean extended-kin networks and families continues to be misrecognized as outside of normative kin groupings. Although studies of Afro-Caribbean households document the presence of close women friends who contribute financially to the household and are considered kin (Bolles 1996; Monagan 1985), same-sex relations have been neglected. Part of the reason for the marginalization of these relationships can be attributed to discriminatory attitudes within the research context that make inclusion of such data difficult for anthropologists. Most accounts of women in same-sex relationships indicate that these women also had boyfriends. But so pervasive is the trope of the dominant heterosexual man that researchers tend to treat same-sex relationships as less consequential even than those with temporary boyfriends. Stories by Afro-Caribbean and African American writers provide ample evidence not only of lesbian relationships in the Caribbean islands but also of women partners who help raise children and are considered part of the extended-kin group long after the children are adults.[25]

Gloria Wekker's (1999, 2005) work focuses specifically on the *mati* work of Afro-Surinamese working-class women in the city of Paramaribo, Suriname. Mati are women who have sexual relationships with men and with women. Although some mati, especially older women, do not have

sex with men anymore, younger mati have a variety of arrangements with men, such as common-law marriage or visiting relationships. Mati relationships between women mostly take the form of visiting relationships, although some women couples and their children live together (Wekker 1999). According to Wekker, the mati relationship "is embedded in a rich flow of reciprocal obligations, which include the sharing of everyday concerns, the raising of children, nurturing, emotional support, and sexual pleasure" (1999:127). Crucially, whether "visiting" or not, mati relationships constitute and are constitutive of extended-kin networks, participating in the same flow of sociality and intimacy found in non-mati households.

The discourse of matrifocality (and woman-headed households) in the Afro-Caribbean context recalls classic kinship theory's assumptions about the centrality not only of marriage and family but also of the Patriarchal Man. The expectation lingers that households and extended-kin groups should include not only a heterosexual couple but also one in which a man is dominant. Because matrifocal Afro-Caribbean households are generally not organized around a heterosexual man and, despite the fact that they may include heterosexual couples who are present for varying lengths of time, they are viewed as problematic departures from the heteronormative family, rather than as viable forms of household constituted through women. Likewise, the headship women are accorded in woman-headed households is rendered meaningful only in conjunction with men's absence. This myopic view works to obscure other relations present within and beyond households, whether of kinswomen, kinsmen, close friends, or same-sex couples.

The "problem" with marriage in West Sumatra

The discourse on matrifocal societies in the Afro-Caribbean context shares certain strong similarities with the discourse on matrilineal societies, such as the Minangkabau in West Sumatra, Indonesia, who have been called "matrifocal" because of the large number of so-called woman-headed households in rural villages.[26] In the Minangkabau case, studies of village life sought to explain and debate the focal position of women in social, economic, and kin relations.[27] Examining the discourse about Minangkabau matriliny, then, offers another avenue to think about the centrality of heteronormative marriage and family in anthropology. As with Afro-Caribbean extended-kin groups, I show how it is the "missing man," the dominant heterosexual man, who is the key to the construction and perpetuation of the "puzzle" of matriliny.

Minangkabau matriliny, as with matrilineal relations in other areas, was troublesome to classic kinship theorists. Descent as well as possession of ancestral land and houses passed from mothers to daughters. Descent and inheritance practices meant that women lived in their own houses, had their own productive resources, and produced their own heirs, not those of their husbands. Central issues for Minangkabau scholars concerned the position of men as brothers and in-married husbands. Older works on the Minangkabau underscored the principle of masculine agency in matrilineal societies by elevating men as brothers to the position of leadership in lineage and village affairs (see Schneider and Gough 1961).[28] This interpretation was challenged by several feminist anthropologists, who were drawn to study the Minangkabau in the 1980s and 1990s. Building on work by Tanner (1971, 1974), who asserted that women hold power informally, these researchers situated women as central to Minangkabau households and lineages. Some argued that Minangkabau women do participate in "formal" spheres of power, such as ceremonial affairs and dispute settlement (see Prindiville 1985; Tanner and Thomas 1985). Others supported the view that Minangkabau women have power within the household, whereas men have power in the "public," or political, domain.[29] My own analysis of rural Minangkabau women interrupts the dichotomy of formal–informal and domestic–public to argue that as lineage elders and landowners, senior women have power that extends throughout the village (see Blackwood 2000). The ongoing debates about gender relations attest to the knotty problems involved in cases that fall outside of heteronormative models of marriage and family.

Here I examine the discourse surrounding men's position as husbands within Minangkabau households. As were other so-called matrifocal societies, the Minangkabau were said to have weak marriages because of the problematic position of the husband. A Minangkabau man at marriage generally moves into his wife's natal household. Assumptions about men's proper place as husbands have led many an anthropologist to focus on the "plight" of the husband in matrilineal societies. Maila Stivens notes that "anthropologists working on Negeri Sembilan ... exhibit some concern for an in-marrying ... man's predicament as a resident of his wife's localized descent group" (1996:231). Since colonial times, men of West Sumatra and Negeri Sembilan (in Malaysia, an area with ancestral ties to the Minangkabau) have come under scrutiny, if not outright ridicule, for living in their wives' houses and "letting" their mothers-in-law "call the shots." Across Malaysia, the practice of husbands living in their wives' extended-kin households is jokingly referred to as "queen control" (Peletz 1994; Stivens 1996). Kinship theorists considered the conjugal bond in matrilineal societies to be "weak" for several reasons: the assumed tension and struggle for power between the husband and the mother's brother, the "interference" of the mother-in-law, and the demands of the husband's own

natal lineage. Such explanations proffer a vision of matriliny in which husbands' actions in their wives' households are politically fraught with meaning, full of masculine competition and angst caused by living as subordinates.

Attempts to understand the "problem" of women's control of houses and land were directed, as in other matrifocal cases, at the husband's position within the household. Minangkabau men are well-known for leaving their home villages in search of fortune (see Kahn 1980; Kato 1982; Naim 1985). Several anthropologists have proposed that Minangkabau men's migration *(merantau)* is in part responsible for Minangkabau women's position of power within households and lineages. Cecilia Ng suggests that the relative absence of men caused by migration "enhances women's position" (1987:70). Mochtar Naim argues that migration left too few men to work in the fields so that "women are *forced* to make decisions without consulting the men" (1985:116, emphasis added). Here the absence of the husband, the missing man, is presented as the reason for women's control.

The story that men are often away in search of economic fortune prompted a discourse of moral economy by Minangkabau men that associated women's land rights with men's (brothers') altruism. In this scenario, women "are given" land because their husbands are unreliable or absent and their brothers have other forms of income available to them (see Blackwood 2001). This refrain is voiced by men in West Sumatra and Negeri Sembilan. Michael Peletz notes that in Negeri Sembilan "women are believed to require greater subsistence guarantees than men partly because they are held to be less flexible, resourceful, and adaptive than men" (1994:23). Women must have resources to fall back on, so he was told, because they may not be able to depend on their husbands.

Some Minangkabau men point to Islamic precepts that enjoin men to protect women as reasons for their supposed altruism. The Minangkabau are devoutly Islamic with a long history of resistance and accommodation to different Islamic schools of thought.[30] In his *adat* writings, the Minangkabau scholar and Islamic cleric Dt. Rajo Penghulu asserted,

> According to Minangkabau adat, economic resources (rice land and dry fields) are primarily for the benefit of women. ... Because men are stronger physically and have greater capabilities than women, to them is given the responsibility and control of the rice land and dry fields. Men are the strong backbone for women; women always work within men's protection. As Islamic law says: Men are the backbone of women. [1994:65][31]

In this particular quote, Dt. Rajo Penghulu is referring to men's position as brothers. He notes that women have use (benefit) of resources, which is justified by invoking a gender hierarchy of control attributed to Islamic law.[32] In this case, it is Islam that is said to enjoin brothers to step in and ensure that women are taken care of by "giving" them the land and houses.

The discourse about women's rights to property in matrilineal societies has usually been taken at face value by anthropologists. These claims, however, draw on assumptions about marriage and dominant masculine heterosexuality that are then used to explain women's control in the absence of the Patriarchal Man. In fact, the rationales are quite circular. In effect, they claim that husbands are not closely tied to their wives because women have their own land and resources, which brothers give to their sisters because husbands are not closely tied to their wives. Rather than reflecting a moral economy in which brothers give up rights to protect their sisters, these claims reflect the tensions between Islamic and state discourses of masculinity and marriage, which ridicule husbands for being under "queen control" and men's own matrilineal practices of cooperation with their natal kin. In effect, the claim that women need protection allows men (who are not dominant in their conjugal relationships) to secure their own masculinity by asserting their agency and control over women who are their sisters. I am not suggesting that all men make this claim but that the discourse is available as a justification for and, indeed, a way to substantiate and thereby continue matrilineal practices that are not in line with state and Islamic ideologies. Thus, men's claim of altruism can be understood within a larger context of state and Islamic discourses that encourage and, in fact, demand such explanations to preserve masculinist practices.

The assumed connection between migration and women's control of houses and land is another misreading of kin relationships. The rural village that was the site of my study has a strong economy based on rice farming; it has not suffered from heavy out-migration.[33] According to my research, migration from one hamlet in the village in 1990 averaged 21 percent of men and 17 percent of women. The ratio of adult women to adult men in the hamlet is 55 percent to 45 percent.[34] Crucially, during the main child-rearing years (ages 26–40), the numbers of men and women in the village are equal. Household composition figures also show that most households (85 percent) have resident, working men, usually husbands, who contribute to household resources, but married brothers and unmarried sons living at home also help their mothers and sisters financially or with their labor. As the numbers demonstrate, this village has not experienced a massive out-migration of men. Minangkabau women in this village are not left behind to manage as best they can without men. In fact, men's ability to leave is often dependent on the willingness of their kinswomen to

support them in their ventures. The discourse of missing men in this instance functions to foreground and normalize the conjugal unit and the importance of the husband's position while diverting attention from and obscuring the relations among consanguineal kin, particularly mothers and daughters but also brothers and sons.

Kin relations in matrihouses

Assumptions about marriage and conjugal couples prompted a discourse about matrilineal kin groups that secured the validity and importance of the husband and the conjugal couple even in their subordinate positions. Rural Minangkabau kin groups constitute a form of relatedness primarily on the basis of the mother–daughter line and its extended kin, both women and men, and only secondarily on the basis of marriage and conjugal ties. This statement does not deny that the Minangkabau consider marriage essential for creating affinal ties and producing lineal heirs. Full adulthood is achieved only through marriage and childbearing, a view supported by Islamic beliefs. My research on Minangkabau kin-group relationships offers a different way to think about men and marriage in Minangkabau households.

Although assumptions about marriage and dominant masculine heterosexuality produce a picture of men in Minangkabau households as dissatisfied agents, a better picture of men's lives comes from examining Minangkabau kin groups and the intertwining of men's positions as husbands and sons.[35] In rural Minangkabau households one can find multiple forms of kin groupings, including nuclear households and extended households.[36] Nuclear households are composed of wife, husband, and children, whereas those kin groups associated with extended households of three to four generations are centered on a core group of kinswomen.[37] In extended households, a son moves out at marriage to live with his wife; a daughter remains in her mother's household after marriage and shares the house, the land, and the food produced. I use the term *matrihouse* to refer to the extended-kin group living in one house. The resident group in such households is usually composed of a senior woman, her husband, her married and unmarried daughters, and her daughters' husbands and children. In 1990 there were 28 matrihouses in which a senior woman and at least one married daughter were present. Husbands were present in 86 percent of these matrihouses, a figure consistent with the overall number of husbands in households in this village.

In matrihouses the conjugal couple, the husband in particular, occupy an important but subsidiary position. They can consider only one room in the house, their bedroom, as theirs alone. As an in-married man, a husband is considered a permanent guest in his wife's house. He "does not become incorporated into his wife's group" (Reenen 1996:29; see also Tanner 1971). In the earlier part of the last century, a husband visited his wife's house only at night, but the effects of state, colonial, and Islamic ideologies have led to the full-time presence of husbands in their wives' houses, when not working elsewhere. Husbands' financial contributions to their wives' households go toward their children's needs and schooling costs. Husbands assist financially in ceremonial events for their wives' matrilineages, especially if those events involve their children. They also participate in the care and nurturance of their children.

In addition to his marital obligations, a Minangkabau man retains membership, responsibilities, and duties to his own natal household and kin group. As a son, he maintains close ties with his natal family throughout his life and can expect to return to his mother's house if he is divorced. Not only is he expected to provide assistance to his mother's household, but he is also an important part of all family deliberations, returning home, if possible, to participate in kin-group meetings.

Because he does not belong to his wife's sublineage, a husband is marginal to the affairs of the kin group centered in his wife's house. He cannot make decisions concerning his wife's lineage affairs, although he may be asked his opinion, especially when it concerns his children. As Peggy Sanday (2002) notes, fathers do not have authority over their children, although they typically maintain close emotional relationships with them. For her part, a woman is centrally involved with the politics of maintaining and improving the status of her household and kin group, through hosting ceremonies and ensuring good marriages for her children among other things (see also Sanday 2002; Whalley 1998). These are concerns that her husband shares somewhat peripherally because of his interests in and responsibilities to his own lineage. Yet, even if men are divorced, as fathers they remain connected with their children and participate along with their kinswomen in ceremonies involving their offspring.

With the significant household relations moving through and managed by women, the husband and conjugal couple in the Minangkabau matrihouse unequivocally take a backseat. Households are identified with the members of the matriline occupying it, not with the conjugal unit of husband and wife. As a pair, they provide very little in the way of household resources. In the large majority of matrihouses, each member of a conjugal pair controls his or her own resources and makes separate contributions to the household, whether in cash income, land, or labor on that land. Their primary task as a couple is to provide heirs to the matriline. Even that reproductive role is somewhat limited, however, because child rearing is also carried out with the help of other kin, both women and men.

Concern with the missing man, the absent or subordinate husband, has led to the misrepresentation of kin

relations in Minangkabau households. Men are present in these households and kin groups as husbands, but it is the mother–daughter and consanguineal ties that are central. My research demonstrates that men as brothers are integral to and cooperate in Minangkabau kin-group relations. As Sanday (2002) also notes, men are proud of their roles as brothers and uncles and value the respect and security they have within their natal households.

Nuclear households

As noted earlier, matrihouses are not the only form of household in rural Minangkabau villages. In the rural village that was the site of my study, a number of households (n = 62) are one- and two-generation households, the majority of which are nuclear households composed of a wife and husband with children. Because there is no senior woman explicitly present in a nuclear household to exert control over her daughter's husband, such households provide an opportunity to examine the husband–wife dynamic in a different context. Does the Patriarchal Man show up? Given classic kinship theory's assumptions about the dominant heterosexual man, if a man is present, he is expected to be and usually is assigned headship of the household by researchers.[38] By examining the conjugal unit in nuclear households, I show that even in this context, assumptions about marriage and men's centrality do not hold up in rural Minangkabau villages.

As in matrihouses, both husbands and wives in nuclear households engage in a variety of income-producing activities, some of which they carry out together and some separately. By averaging data on land ownership or access across all nuclear households, I found that the husband, on average, provides 23 percent and the wife 64 percent of land that is available to the household; the remainder is land that the couple has obtained jointly. Women's greater control of land through matrilineal inheritance means that nuclear households are organized around and dependent primarily on the wife's land.[39] A husband's contributions to the household are important, but the bulk of land and resources flow through and are controlled by the wife. In these nuclear households, then, property and inheritance do not flow from parents as a unit to children, but primarily from mothers to daughters. Fathers may pass on some of their earned income to children, a practice that has become more common because of Dutch and Islamic influences, but ancestral land and houses remain with their sisters. Contrary to assumptions about men's agency and authority in conjugal relationships, husbands in Minangkabau nuclear households cooperate with, rather than control, their wives because wives usually have greater control of household land and production.

Some nuclear households in my study seem to reflect heteronormative assumptions about nuclear families because women in these households are housewives, that is, "nonworking" wives. When farm households achieve a certain level of income, some, but not all, women cease working in the fields. Rather than retiring to the house, however, these women become overseers of the agricultural operation on their lands. Although often pegged as housewives in state surveys, these women are economically active managers and landowners with their own sources of income. Almost all the "dependent" wives in the village are young women with very small children. Most of these young mothers, however, live in matrihouses, in which the number of income producers allows the women to concentrate on the care of their small children. As wives, only a tiny percentage of women in the village fit the model of the at-home housewife dependent on her husband's earnings and good will. These household arrangements suggest that what might be simply labeled a "nuclear" household may not reflect normative assumptions, thus raising questions about the reliability of cross-cultural comparisons on the basis of household composition.

The status of new houses built by husbands for their wives and children has raised questions about the possibility of husbands gaining greater control in such situations. Husbands are expected to build houses for their wives as a sign of their own prosperity, but these houses are considered the property of the women and after them, their daughters. Peletz (1994) calls this practice "patrifiliation," the creation and transmission of property rights by men to women. Although this designation recognizes the husband's agency in building the house, that agency needs to be balanced with a consideration of the rights of the matrilineage in the husband. To understand this relationship, one needs to examine the exchange of men in marriage.[40] On the day of a wedding ceremony, the groom is picked up by the bride's kin and brought to her house. During the formal speeches by men elders, the groom is led to the wedding seat to sit beside the bride, signifying his transfer from his own kin to the bride's kin group. This move also signifies the transfer of rights over his offspring to his wife's kin.[41] That no one questions why women get houses that men build indicates that rights to the products of a husband's labor, other than earned income, also transfer to his wife at marriage. These rights are continually reconstituted as properly belonging to women despite the hegemonic discourses of the state and Islam, which identify men as heads and owners of households (see Blackwood 1999).

In sum, in studies of so-called matrifocal societies such as the Minangkabau, many of the questions asked and conclusions reached by researchers were the result of assumptions about the dominant heterosexual man, the Patriarchal Man. These assumptions divert attention from the constitutive relations in Minangkabau households and kin groups, leading to a focus on absent or marginal men

as the probable cause for women's control of land and lineal affairs. In my research, I found that the normative model of conjugal relations is absent. In this particular case, intergenerational ties through women, rather than heterosexual conjugal bonds, are constitutive of households and kin groups. Minangkabau women, their daughters, and kin, both women and men, constitute the principal links and dominant figures in rural Minangkabau households and kin groups, whether situated in nuclear households or matrihouses, whereas men, as sons, become important links to other lineages and serve as elders in their own lineages. Men, as husbands and fathers, are present and involved with child rearing and other activities of the household, but their presence alone does not imply anything about the relationships in the household. Kin relations oriented toward and controlled by kinswomen, in particular the mother–daughter unit, are both the normative and empirical form of household for rural Minangkabau.

Conclusion

I began this article by suggesting that classic kinship theory constructs heterosexuality and masculine domination as normative while suppressing other meanings. Heterosexuality and masculine domination come together in the trope of the Patriarchal Man, which continues to cast a long shadow over theories of kinship, marriage, and family. Feminist challenges to kinship theory have been successful in denaturalizing kinship and gender, underscoring the social constructedness of forms of relatedness. Nevertheless, the dominant heterosexual man has remained at the heart of marriage and family. This fixity on the trope of the Patriarchal Man has led anthropologists to misrecognize other forms of relatedness as less than or weaker than heteronormative marriage.

The debates about matrifocality reveal the assumptions that create and then perpetuate matrifocality as a nonnormative form of kinship. In studies of both Afro-Caribbean and Minangkabau households, the key to the construction and perpetuation of the concept of "matrifocality" lay with the absent or weak husband. In the Afro-Caribbean context, the dizzying proliferation of household types defined not only by the presence or absence of a (dominant, heterosexual) man but also by the duration of his visits reinforced the heteronormative ideal of family. The discourse of masculine rescue deployed in West Sumatra works in the same way to reinforce women's lack of agency and need for a dominant heterosexual man. Senior Minangkabau women have control in all ways typically attributed by researchers to men in households, through seniority, control of land, and access to rank, but the trope of the Patriarchal Man continues to make this assessment problematic.

Comparison to patrilineal societies is instructive. The subordination of the conjugal couple to agnatic relations (between fathers and sons or between brothers) is well accepted in studies of patrilineal households. For instance, in his rich rendition of Nepalese Silwal joint households, John Gray (1995) casts the patriline as the constitutive unit of the household. Men of the patriline, who share rights to land, are expected to stay in the same household, making the brother–brother tie an extremely important one. The conjugal couple, although important in producing heirs, is viewed as secondary; it is also said to conflict with agnatic relations (Gray 1995). Further, entry and exit of women, as wives, does not change the way the household and kin group see themselves because they are defined by the patriline of father and sons. In this case, the centrality and dominance of reproductive patrilineal kinsmen allow Gray to put marriage and the conjugal unit in its place.

Current concerns about woman-headed households and single moms in the United States and elsewhere employ readily available heteronormative models of family to problematize the woman "alone." These categories of household demand recognition that something is missing despite the presence of other forms of relationships. I am not suggesting that we ignore the material conditions of women's lives or that we ignore marriage where it is socially relevant, but that, as anthropologists, we work to question categories that depend on normative assumptions about men and heterosexual couples for their meaning.

Borneman's effort to critique marriage is critically important, yet equally important to such efforts is an analysis of how differences are inflected through and coalesce in marriage. If anthropology's normative model of marriage is at its core about the dominant heterosexual man, then how one thinks about nonmarriage is also inflected by that gender difference. As my discussion of so-called matrifocal societies demonstrates, there is ample evidence of kin practices and intimate relations without marriage or lacking marriage in the normative model of a dominant heterosexual man, a wife, and children, yet these cases have been and continue to be reconfigured to reflect normative assumptions about marriage and masculinity.[42] The debates about matrifocal practices expose the way men, even when they are "missing," are foregrounded in couples as primary, whereas women without men are thought to be incomplete halves.[43] Fueled by the trope of the Patriarchal Man, the missing man narrative fails to take into account men's multiple positionalities. According to this narrative, the only acceptable condition of manhood is dominance and heterosexuality. The real missing men turn out to be those men positioned within families, extended-kin networks, and other forms of sociality or intimacy who do not stand in a relationship of heterosexual dominance or control

over others. Thus, a critique of marriage must examine the gendered assumptions that denormalize other forms of relatedness.

I use this critique of the dominant heterosexual man and his place at the heart of marriage and family as a way to see beyond the "normality" and centrality of marital relations predicated on a husband–wife bond. My aim is to encourage a view of human relatedness that takes account of its multiplicity and complexity in specific locations. Recent work offers some intriguing possibilities. Borneman suggests identifying marriage as a radial pattern, rather than a central referent, arguing that "no single model of marriage, no universal equivalent, is able to account for all of the types that go by the name" (1996:230). In devising her approach to kinship, Janet Carsten (2000a) uses the term *relatedness* as a way to move beyond assumptions about what constitutes kinship. The importance of material and symbolic practices in creating relatedness is offered by Mary Weismantel, who points out that for the Zumbagua of the Andes, shared substance (food), labor, service, and nurturance create "real kin relations" (1995:697).

In line with these advances, I suggest that, rather than positing a foundational or universal model for human sociality, intimacy, or relatedness, researchers look for webs of meaningful relationships in their historical and social specificity. This approach will allow us to recognize marital relations as one configuration within many forms of relatedness. Rather than assume the centrality of marital relations, anthropologists need to demonstrate in particular cases whether marriage constitutes the focal relationship or not. Such an approach means recognizing the way discursive practices are strategically reinstalled and recuperated in specific times and places. It also means looking beyond the discourse of the normative both in academic literature and in the sites we investigate. To represent the complexity of human relationships, we need to refuse the analytical operation that transmutes emic categories of relatedness into normative models of kinship, thereby negating the radical challenge to theories of marriage and family offered by resistant, practical, emergent, and interstitial forms of relatedness. This move also requires recognition of the role of hegemonic and colonial ideologies in creating and suppressing "nonnormative" forms of relatedness. Butler (1990) is correct to suggest that researchers need to call into question the validity of normative structures by recognizing the unaccounted for relationships and practices that lurk around the normative. Yet even the dualism of normative–nonnormative can be too limiting. To fix a perspective that persists in seeing normative models of marriage and family where multiplicity exists requires attention to complex issues of intimacy, relatedness, and interconnectedness as they are manifest in diverse practices and discourses in specific historical and social contexts.

Notes

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1. The title of this article is taken from Laura Nyro's (1996) song of the same name.

2. The status of kinship and marriage has been part of a prolonged debate, but some of the key critical texts include Yanagisako and Collier 1987, Needham 1971, Schneider 1984, and Yanagisako 1979.

3. On the "new anthropology of kinship," see Faubion 1996 and introductions to Carsten 2000b and Franklin and McKinnon 2001.

4. This discussion disregards for the moment the problem of viewing societies as cohesive wholes, given that my interest here is to examine why particular concepts are developed.

5. See Borneman 1996, Carsten 2000a, Franklin and McKinnon 2001, Holy 1996, and Kuper 1988.

6. See McKinnon 2001 for an excellent comparison of the different interpretations of kinship developed by Radcliffe-Brown and Lévi-Strauss.

7. See also Carol Delaney's (1986, 2001) important critique of Western forms of kinship and their relation to the patriarchal myths of the Christian bible.

8. This view was not Lévi-Strauss's alone. Both alliance and descent theorists shared similar views of women (see Yanagisako and Collier 1996:236).

9. Similarly, Borneman notes that, despite the centrality Lévi-Strauss gives to women as objects of exchange, "this centrality for 'the woman' relies solely on her definition as the alter, the exchange item, of 'the man'—she is meaningless without him" (1996:222).

10. Franklin 2001 notes the resonance between their argument and that in Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990).

11. I can hardly do justice here to the proliferation of excellent studies, but I note a couple of trends.

12. See, for example, Lewin 1993, 1998; Strathern 1992; Weismantel 1995; and Weston 1997.

13. This is a large body of work, but an excellent overview of the field can be found in Lewin and Leap 2002.

14. See, for example, Franklin 1997, Franklin and McKinnon 2001, Ragoné 1994, Ragoné and Twine 2000, and Rapp 1999.

15. See Yanagisako's (1977) critique of the emphasis on the affective bond between mothers and their children as the key to matrifocal households.

16. I am not suggesting that researchers should ignore the poverty of many such households but that the correlation of woman-headed households with poverty misdirects attention away from political, social, and global processes that leave women undereducated, underskilled, and undervalued for the work they do.

17. See Barrow 1986, 1996; Bolles 1996; and Monagan 1985 for a more extensive history and critique of these issues.

18. The experience of slavery has also been considered a contributing factor to the development of matrifocality. This brief recitation cannot do justice to the complexity of the debates. I am interested here primarily in the way the discussion was framed, rather than in seeking underlying causes.

19. But see Elliston 1997, which recoups the term as a way to signify the balance of power between women and men within households.

20. Looking back over her own research on the Garifuna living in the town of Livingston, Guatemala, Nancie Gonzalez states that "there is a sense in which these matrifocal family and consanguineal household institutions might be thought not to be healthy for those living in them—*particularly for males*" (1984:10, emphasis added).

21. Lack of recognition of the diverse relationships in Afro-Caribbean households was caused in large part by colonial and racist attitudes toward African Americans and Afro-Caribbeans. Many researchers claimed that extended-kin relations were adaptations to poverty, stress, and outside forces, in effect, invalidating these cultural practices across a large part of the United States and Caribbean region.

22. See also Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí, who argues that anthropologists' focus on women as wives led to the emphasis on the conjugal tie in "African families" when "consanguineal ties" are primary (2000:1096).

23. Some exceptions include Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994, Peletz 1996, Weismantel 1995, and studies that explore the differences between dominant and nondominant forms of masculinities, such as Lancaster 1992 and Manalansan 2003.

24. See Blackwood and Wieringa 1999a on the heterosexual deprivation theory.

25. See Elwin 1997 and Silvera 1992. For studies of women's same-sex relations in other areas of the world, see Blackwood and Wieringa 1999b.

26. My use of the term *matrilineal* here is not meant to reify a particular form of kinship structure over actual relations. See Blackwood 2000.

27. The Minangkabau living in West Sumatra numbered approximately 4.2 million in 2000. Citizens of the Indonesian state, they are the largest matrilineal group in the world.

28. This interpretation was offered in works such as Bachtiar 1967 and Kato 1982.

29. See Kahn 1976; Krier 1994, 1995; Ng 1987; and Reenen 1996. Sanday 2002 would fall into this group, as well, although this work sees the two spheres as richly complementary and therefore balanced.

30. On the history of Islam in West Sumatra, see Abdullah 1966 and Dobbin 1977. Despite clashes between their matrilineal practices and Islamic law in the past, the Minangkabau today affirm that their beliefs and practices are both Islamic and Minangkabau.

31. *Adat* refers generally to a set of local customs, beliefs, and practices concerning matrilineal kinship and inheritance, but it is more than rules of kinship and behavior or prescriptions for ceremonies. It constitutes the foundational discourse for Minangkabau identity and ethnicity (see Kato 1982; Sanday 1990). Adat "rules" were codified by the Dutch in the 1800s.

32. For a complete analysis of the representations of women in Dt. Rajo Penghulu's writings, see Blackwood 2001.

33. My research was conducted during 1989–90 and 1996 in the wet-rice farming village of Taram in the easternmost district of West Sumatra. Taram's population in 1989 was approximately 6,800. I focused on one hamlet of 125 households with a population of 583, which I call Tanjung Batang. Not all rice-farming villages in West Sumatra experience the same conditions; some may have more migration if there is less land available for farming.

34. Figures are based on my 1989 survey of 115 farm households, which were dependent primarily on income from rice fields.

35. Other researchers have also discussed the duality of men's position as husband and brother, including Prindiville 1985, Reenen 1996, Sanday 2002, and Tanner 1971. I do so here to demonstrate the subordinate position of the conjugal couple.

36. Extended households of three or more generations make up 26 percent of all households, nuclear households 35 percent. Another 29 percent are a diverse group of two-generation, non-nuclear households, and the remainder are single generation.

37. I use *household* here to refer to the individuals residing in a particular house, but I do not mean to suggest that only members of individual households count as kin or family. Kin and affinal networks are quite extensive in West Sumatra.

38. The state of Indonesia participates in this practice by labeling men heads of household on census forms (see Blackwood 1995).

39. In 43 percent of single-family households (23 percent of all households) both husband and wife contribute equally to household income and decision making about household resources. But even in these households, matrilineal relations structure production, access to resources, and lineal affairs.

40. See, for example, Krier 1995, 2000; Peletz 1987, 1996; and Sanday 2002 regarding the significance of groom exchange for the Minangkabau and culturally similar people of Negeri Sembilan.

41. There is some debate as to the significance of groom price, but I would agree with Sanday 2002 that the exchange signifies the rights of the matrilineage in the groom.

42. Other societies without marriage are arguably the Nayar (see Schneider and Gough 1961) and the Moso of China (Shih 2001). The interest in the Na of southwest China appears to stem primarily from their depiction as a "society without fathers or husbands," the phrase used in Cai Hua's (2001) book title.

43. This also recalls Rubin's (1975) argument about compulsory heterosexuality.

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Evelyn Blackwood
Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Purdue University
700 West State Street
West Lafayette, IN 47907
blackwood@cla.purdue.edu