

## **Is the 'Family' Universal?**

The universality of the family has always been accepted as a sound hypothesis in anthropology; recently, Murdock has been able to confirm this hypothesis on the basis of his important cross-cultural study of kinship. Furthermore, Murdock reports that the "nuclear" family is also universal, and that typically it has four functions: sexual, economic, reproductive and educational. What is more important is his finding that no society "has succeeded in finding an adequate substitute for the nuclear family, to which it might transfer these functions"? In the light of this evidence there would be little reason to question his prediction that "it is highly doubtful whether any society ever will succeed in such an attempt. The functions served by the nuclear family are of course universal fundamentals for the survival of any society; and it is on this basis that Murdock accounts for its universality.

Without provision for the first and third (sexual and reproductive), society would become extinct; for the second (economic), life itself would cease; for the fourth (educational), culture would come to an end. The immense social utility of the nuclear family and the basic reason for its universality thus begins to emerge in strong relief.

Although sexual, economic, reproductive and educational activities are the functional prerequisites of any society it comes as somewhat of a surprise, nevertheless, that all four functions are served by the same social group. One would normally assume, on purely a priori grounds, that within the tremendous variability to be found among human cultures, there would be some cultures in which these four functions were distributed among more than one group. Logically, at least, it is entirely possible for these functions to be divided among various social groups within society; and it is, indeed, difficult to believe that somewhere man's inventive ingenuity should not have actualised this logical possibility.

An example is a kibbutz, this is a community of people who share the chores of cleaning cooking working and taking care of the children this type of family was started in Israel and slowly spread to the rest of the world and whilst it is not as common as other types of family it is still a family community and therefore does disagree with Murdock's family rule.

To expand Murdock's rule to accommodate other types of families would make it better and more sensible for modern day society but then it wouldn't be Murdock's rule. When Murdock was writing the nuclear family may have been the most socially accepted family but times have changed and the family has evolved to accommodate different peoples views opinions and feelings towards what the family is, so even though Murdock's view of the family was right in the 1940's it is no longer a valid view of the family. Therefore the nuclear family is universal but so is the matrifocal step reconstituted and single parent.