The Athabascans of Interior Alaska: A Culture and Personality Perspective

Author(s): Arthur E. Hippler

Source: *American Anthropologist*, Oct., 1973, New Series, Vol. 75, No. 5 (Oct., 1973), pp. 1529-1541

Published by: Wiley on behalf of the American Anthropological Association

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/674047

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at https://about.jstor.org/terms

American Anthropological Association and *Wiley* are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *American Anthropologist*

This content downloaded from
137.229.131.9 on Fri, 11 Aug 2023 22:54:14 +00:00
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

The Athabascans of Interior Alaska: A Culture and Personality Perspective

ARTHUR E. HIPPLER
University of Alaska

Traditional Athabascan institutions are related to the modal personality and culture of the group. It is shown how otherwise pathic aspects of personality were creatively integrated into these institutions. The collapse of these institutions due to acculturative pressure is discussed and the release of these pathic aspects described. Finally it is suggested that a new creative reintegration is under way, based upon old Athabascan personality dimensions and new institutions which function in a fashion similar to traditional ones.

THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL and related literature concerning the Athabascan Indians of interior Alaska is both relatively sparse (compared to that available for Eskimos) and generally lacking in a psychodynamic perspective. It is our hope here to attempt a partial rectification of this lack and also to integrate existing materials and our own observations with a general overview of the relationship between culture and personality in this group.

Varied approaches have been taken to the study of culture and personality in the past. On the one hand, proponents of psychoanalytic theory such as Roheim (1950) have attempted to reduce all such studies to a discussion of the antecedent psychological causes of behavior. Others such as Inkeles (1960) have stressed the primacy of social structural factors. In our judgment, however, the best works have been those which have taken an integrative view discussing relationships causally when appropriate, but generally stressing the interdependence and interpenetration of culture, personality, and social structure.[1] This shall be our aim in discussing Athabascans.

Accepted for publication August 2, 1972

ATHABASCAN CULTURE AND PERSONALITY

The Athabascans of interior Alaska lived and still live in one of the harshest environments humanly habitable. Game densities are low and vegetable food very scarce, or at least made little use of. Winter temperatures over much of interior Alaska commonly reach 50° below zero and occasional periods of −60° and −70° or even colder are routinely experienced. Comparatively, temperatures on the Arctic coast of Alaska rarely go below −35° and many more prey species are available for exploitation. The winters are long as well as cold, and with the limited food supply of aboriginal times starvation was common and hunger endemic.

The poverty of prey species dictated that with few exceptions, Athabascans lived in very small communities of sixty to one hundred persons in the winter, trying to maintain themselves on food cached during the short periods of abundance. During the period generally from May to November, Athabascans lived in small fish camps from which they ventured forth to hunt. Such camps rarely contained over ten persons, usually an extended matrilineal family, the base of Athabascan social organization (McKennan 1959; Osgood 1937).

This content downloaded from
137.229.131.9 on Fri, 11 Aug 2023 22:54:14 +00:00
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

These matrilineal extended families were grouped into clans, themselves grouped into two or sometimes three moieties.[2] Marriage was of the cross-cousin type exogamous to the clan and the moiety. The clan and moiety organization of Canadian Athabascans has been described as "loose" with post-marital residence highly flexible (Helm 1968). Our findings, however, suggest that moiety exogamy was relatively inflexible in Alaska and that immediate post-marital residence was matrilocal, then neolocal in the area of the wife's matriline.[3]

Interclan and inter-moiety relationships were crucial to maintaining social order and in providing mutually supportive relationship between bands. Because of the great difficulty in making a living, cooperative hunting activity was vital. Since it was also true that unrelated bands were suspicious and warlike toward each other, mutual obligation and reciprocal expectation systems were established between moieties and these provided a security system as well.

In very broad terms, we might characterize these Athabascans as living in a cold, harsh, non-nurturant environment, forced to isolate themselves from each other by sheer ecological pressure. Fearful of their environment and numerous demons which they believed inhabited it, they were mutually suspicious of each other, warlike, and aggressive.

It is in the socialization experience and the value system and coping mechanisms which it demanded that we can find a key to the way in which the subsistence system, social organization, and institutions interrelated. Indeed, we suggest that the manner in which Athabascans integrated their exterior and interior worlds was significantly determined by the physical environment.[4] This integration provided the positive achievement of creating a viable life system upon what at first glance might appear to have been a quite pathological personality substrate.

There are, of course, serious methodological difficulties in presenting detailed analyses of pre-contact child rearing patterns. Further, though it is our belief that these have remained essentially stable over the last eighty years (the intense contact period with Whites for many Athabascans), this must be based in part on theoretical rather than objective grounds.

To overcome this lack, we have had recourse to a variety of expedients. We do have fairly detailed accounts of some aspects of child rearing from older Upper Tanana, Tanaina, and Koyukon Indians. These are not descriptions of emotional interactions *per se*, but of ceremonial and other overt behaviors. We have an excellent collection of Upper Tanana and Tanana mythology in part from McKennan's work and in part from our own collection and, following Kluckhohn (1942), we find unconscious psychodynamic concerns reflected in it. We also have our own observations of contemporary Upper Tanana, Tanaina, and Tanana child rearing and the results of projective tests, principally the Rorschach and some Thematic Apperception Tests,[5] for support.

A continual feedback of hypotheses derived from older informants' information, amended by an analysis of the psychodynamic concerns present in the mythology and by those present in taboos and superstitions, compared with the ethnographic record such as it is, and finally the addition of our own observations of present day Athabascan child rearing suggest somewhat the following.

The Athabascan mother tended toward matter-of-fact adequate but not warm, emotionally gratifying child care. We postulate that, faced with the probably eighty percent infant mortality rate which Athabascans faced in aboriginal times, mothers tended to develop a defensive non-involvement with the infant who might so quickly be taken from her by starvation. R. Boyer (1962) notes this for Southern Athabascans as well. In addition, this mother herself was the product of a child rearing which left her jealous of infants, tending toward an oral aggressive stance on her own and already an emotional isolate for reasons we shall point out below. Briefly, unconscious forces and the

This content downloaded from
137.229.131.9 on Fri, 11 Aug 2023 22:54:14 +00:00
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

reality of the child's possible death from starvation combined to make her rather cold, distant and non-nurturant.

We believe that three critical factors came together in the early life of a "typical"[6] Athabascan infant which had implications for its entire psychosexual development: (1) hunger was always real and its occurrence was endemic; (2) inevitably year after year, younger siblings died; and (3) mother was perceived as "cold."

When the mother begins to produce little or thin milk as a result of malnutrition, the child may be too immature to perceive the mother's hunger *per se*, but may sense her anxiety communicated by muscular tensions and mood shifts. The child will then naturally interpret these events in light of his own focus of anxieties, that is, his need for nurturant care. With his archaic emotional organization, he may well develop a very serious increase in his talion anxiety about being devoured (Klein 1957). He wishes to eat the mother, and he fears her retaliation even more since he can perceive her hunger. In addition, due to the very lack of ego-other differentiation of the very young infant, this hunger will likely lead to a diffuse anxiety throughout his adult life (Greenacre 1952).

His lack of satisfaction, irritability, and fear may well produce either reciprocal irritation or anxiety in his mother. In either event, the infant's perception of her responses will also likely increase its talion anxiety, since its omnipotence fantasies will make it feel responsible (Freud 1957).

Much more might be said, but, at the very least, the infant will probably, if it lives, come to have very deep oral longings and anxieties about them. It will also very likely have confused feelings of guilt over and anger toward its mother. As the child grows older, his observations of the deaths of children about him and/or his younger siblings can only intensify such fear and create additional problems. The attention which his or other mothers in the small group give to babies, however inadequate it may be from the perspective of adults, will probably create intense feelings of jealousy and even murderous rage directed both at the baby and ambivalently at the mother. If the baby should die, and it usually did, the young child must inevitably feel a deep sense of guilt over the death, plus a heightening of truly terrifying omnipotence feelings and a belief in the danger of its uncontrolled emotions.

Thus, the child, out of its anger and jealousy toward its young siblings, likely developed not only guilt concerning the infant's death, but a fear of his uncontrollable wish impulses and a corresponding need for emotional controls. In fact, one of the strongest of adult Athabascan values is the rigid control of emotional expression. Overt positive affect between adult males and females was and is exceedingly rare. Aggressive urges were dealt with in a somewhat different fashion, as we shall note.

In addition, the child (especially if a girl) was usually given the duty of helping to care for the baby, thus being forced into the position of adopting the maternal position toward its hated young rival. The child who is placed in the position of caring for younger siblings has the opportunity to develop defensive reaction formation. To the degree that this defense is successful, his (her) jealousy and the attendant guilt remain unconscious and potentially subject to sublimation. However, in an environment in which both the external environment and the relative aloofness of the mother combined with her affording younger children more attention, there will be a strong tendency toward the return of the repressed hostility and guilt. The older child then tended toward solicitousness as a defensive posture, and inevitably the youngest child, and in fact all the younger living children, were in turn "spoiled," further weakening their internal controls. This tended at one and the same time to heighten oral cravings and to increase the guilt which accompanied them for the infant. It also functioned to increase omnipotence feelings yet heightened the anxieties which accompanied them.

Finally, mother's perceived coldness can

This content downloaded from
137.229.131.9 on Fri, 11 Aug 2023 22:54:14 +00:00
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

only be interpreted in limited ways by the child. It can split the mother and the maternal introject, which the ego comes largely to be made up of (Freud 1961 [1923]), into the "good" (nurturant, present) and the "bad" (non-nurturant, absent) mother. It may also project the "bad" maternal introject out onto the universe at large, investing the universe with demons. But it finally inevitably reintrojects such demons since the child always tends to reintroject the "good" and "bad" figures as part of the self through his desire to fuse with the mother (Lewin 1950), which makes it difficult to get rid of a feeling of interior "badness." As Hippler, Boyer, and Boyer (n.d.) note, since warmth is generally unavailable to the Athabascan child, he cannot correct this perspective and continues to view mother as "bad" and hence himself as "bad" as well. The fact that grandmother may be warmer than mother seems instead of helping the situation merely to increase the child's incapacity to integrate the "good" (grandmother) and the "bad" (mother).

The child may also interpret its mother's coldness as due not to some defect in mother but to an inadequacy in the self. This unacceptable "bad self" will also be projected; but, both as a projection and as a reintroject, it will provide a fearful and hostile emotional environment for the child.

General support for these anxieties was additionally provided in the folklore. We assume with Dundes (1965) and Boyer and Boyer (1967) that folklore provides a group-supported means of expressing individual asocial urges in a non-anxious fashion, and we interpret such folklore as if it were the manifest content of dreams (Freud 1953). The folklore is full of demons, concerns with nurturance being used to trick one into danger, and violent aggression against women and by women toward men. Most Athabascans of any age, even at present, appear to be convinced that the universe is populated with a variety of demons, some of which steal children (apparently a projected wish of what might happen to the younger sibling and what one fears for the self). Others in this demonic pantheon have sharp teeth and bite (will do to you what you were afraid mother would do because you wanted to eat her up), or are vague, shadowy ghosts who are dangerous in some unclear way (representing free floating unbound anxiety or guilt about death wishes directed toward parents and siblings).

The child at the minimum, we believe, then grew to adulthood with deeply ambivalent feelings toward the mother—great unsatisfied oral needs which have become fused with hostile even murderous impulses. It learned to defend itself against these feelings by a massive expenditure of emotional energy directed toward the control of emotional expression. Finally, through the process of being "spoiled," contrary superego introjects were developed to the point that controls were difficult while this superego still retained a punitive character.

The literature, and to some extent present practices and statements of values, suggests that the period of sphincter control training was also fairly harsh. We have observed Indian mothers berating six-month-old infants for soiling their diapers, "You are trying to annoy me." If this was common aboriginally, as we believe, by the time the child was physiologically mature enough to control his anal sphincter, he already had attached much anxiety to his performance.

It is also possible that the child may have perceived this part of the socialization experience as a form of rejection. Before it was even possible for the child to control himself, he was being pressured to do so. Further, his presentation of the gift of his feces to his mother was never acceptable.

While the vicissitudes of aggressive, oral, and mastery needs and concerns are not clear in the oedipal period for this group, we may surmise at least the following: aboriginally, the father belonged to another clan than the mother. In the Athabascan sense, his natural children were not really "his" but belonged to his wife's clan. He was expected to provide for them while his wife's brothers supported his clan members, "his" children. (The same kin term is used for one's own

This content downloaded from
137.229.131.9 on Fri, 11 Aug 2023 22:54:14 +00:00
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

children and one's sister's children.)

Mother's brother was considered the most important socializing agent for the boy. He also helped arrange marriages for the girl. While this might have functioned to increase the number of relevant adult socializers for this child and thus widen his family, it does not appear to have done so. Athabascans are very clear about the difference between their "own" family (mother's clan) and "others" (father's clan).

In addition, since marriages tended to be matrilocal, father felt himself somewhat a stranger in his wife's house. In fact, his function was overtly stated as subordinate to his wife's. His duty was to provide food; hers was to maintain the family. As is common in such matrilineal societies, Athabascan men tended to spend much of their time in the men's house. In fact, Athabascan men seemed to feel more comfortable in the company of fellow clansmen than in the company of women. Moreover, he was often absent entirely on hunting or trapping trips.

Therefore, with father absent and the child being continually in mother's company, often sleeping in her bed or at least near her, the boy at least must have experienced serious anxieties about sexual controls due to the arousal of sexual feelings for the mother. These axieties in turn were made more severe by the very rigorous taboos on premarital sexuality. Violating such taboos was punished in part by making the offender ineligible as a good hunting or trading partner. This probably re-elicited concerns which fused anal and sexual instincts.[7] We believe some cross-sex identity fears were probably elicited by this situation, as they are common in other cultures with similar patterns of child rearing (Hippler 1969, 1970; Burton and Whiting 1961).

Generally, then, we can see an adult Athabascan Indian as having had to cope with an additional element of lowered self-esteem (through his early toilet training) and increased anger at this perceived stern, socializing mother over and above that derived from his earliest experiences. Finally, he would come even to view sexuality as dangerous, as his initially desired object would be the unconsciously enticing but oral devouring *vagina dentata* mother whom he had no ever present father to protect him against, and these fears would be strengthened by a general sex taboo which would convince him that there was indeed something pretty terrifying about women.[8] His fears of women would be further institutionally supported. All Alaska Athabascans isolated girls at the onset of menarche as they did menstruating women and those delivering children. Many taboos stress that female genital blood was poisonous and dangerous. We have noted elsewhere that the acceptance of a negative valuation by women suggests very strongly that they had internalized a "bad" mother, but taboos that suggest men preferred the company of men to women must have led to female resentment as well (Hippler, Boyer, and Boyer 1973).

These concerns were reflected in adult life by fears of demons and ghosts, a poorly developed cosmology which had no integrated systematic theory to explain the universe and by anxieties about sex reflected in the late age of marriage for men (late twenties). More creatively, these concerns were integrated in two extremely important institutions, the potlatch (see Hippler, Boyer and Boyer 1973), and the law ways (see Hippler and Conn 1972).

THE POTLATCH

The potlatch is and was a ceremony at which the matriline of the deceased pays with gifts the members of the opposite moiety who have prepared the body (which is tabooed to its own clansmen since it is dangerous) for burial.

Briefly, the potlatch ceremony occurs when an adult male, lineal or affinal relative (it varies)[9] of the deceased, organizes a postmortem party. Moieties owed each other this reciprocal service as part of a system of obligations which included raising children for each other, as we have noted. These gifts were given based on a schedule which included a recognition of affinally-based ties,

This content downloaded from
137.229.131.9 on Fri, 11 Aug 2023 22:54:14 +00:00
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

political considerations, and expectations of future rewards.

Thus, the powerful adult males in the exchanging clans established a system of reciprocal obligations which, through the judicious use of arranged marriages, ensured not only continued contracts between the clans but also ensured that these would result in continued gift exchanges.

The practical importance of this is nearly self-evident. As a man got older and developed more and more ramified affinal relationships through his maturing children and as the gift exchanges were broadened to include persons matrilineally related to him (however distantly) in other communities, he found himself the recipient of an ever expanding number of gift exchanges; and, in turn, by having more people to give things to and more to borrow from for potlatches, he found his political power increasing.

In a culture where intense hostilities between many isolated bands of mutually suspicious people were the norm, such power acted to reduce the incidence of feuding and warfare. It also provided the basis for stable predictable friendships outside of the matrilineal clan. Moreover, such an institution provided an incentive for capital accumulation and a technique for the distribution of capital goods in a physical environment where capital accumulation might otherwise be seriously retarded.

This in turn maintained a generally egalitarian level of wealth and in fact probably acted to reduce the jealousy which might otherwise have resulted from too great a capital accumulation by one family. Since such capital was useless for gaining prestige (even though the items such as blankets, etc., were quite utilitarian items), it would not be hoarded unless one could "buy" political influence and friendship ties with it.

There were even more subtle aspects to the potlatch, however. The amount of a gift not only reflected a man's position, but also significant increases or decreases in the size of a potlatch gift from the expected amount could change a man's position (if the change in gift size went unchallenged). Therefore, not only were there elements of competitiveness in the potlatch, but also even an attack on another man's social position could be launched by giving him the wrong kind of "gifts."

The "gifts" then were not actually gifts at all. First, the potlatch giver except in the rarest of cases was never able to give a big potlatch by himself. He would ordinarily have to borrow from his matriline and such loans had to be paid back with interest. This meant that at the same time a man was becoming a creditor to the opposing moiety group, he was indebting himself to his own matriline. Sometimes such debts took years to repay.

The potlatcher also had to take some care in his gift giving. If he gave too large a gift, he would be thought foolish; the recipient would be embarrassed and he would antagonize other recipients. In addition, he could not expect to receive so inflated a gift in return. He likewise could not give too small a gift even to an enemy; it could be smaller than the recipient liked perhaps, but not outside the range of the permissible and expected. Since everyone knew the relative merits and relationship involved, even minor deviations from expectations were fraught with symbolic meaning.

We assume, as we shall discuss below, that the major unconscious factors in the potlatch have to do with concerns about the death of the loved one, ambivalence in feelings concerning that loved one, and very archaic notions about fusion with the parental imago. Conscious functions, on the other hand, appear to have dealt with real world problems of affiliation, alliance, and distribution of material goods.

The latent function of the potlatch, we believe, was to provide a technique of dealing with the anxiety caused by the death of an inevitably, ambivalently perceived matrilineal kinsman.[10]

While the dynamics are clearest in the case of a son giving a potlatch for his mother, we assume that the feelings toward the mother may have been displaced onto

This content downloaded from
137.229.131.9 on Fri, 11 Aug 2023 22:54:14 +00:00
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

other members of the matriline as well. If we remember that the child developed ambivalent feelings toward both the mother and siblings, all of whom were members of his matriline, and that he had infantile experience of the omnipotence of his murderous feelings toward siblings, it seems likely that these archaic feelings generated not only guilt over the death of the ambivalently "loved" clansman but also talion anxiety over the anger of this ghost.

We are thus offered a clue not only to the reasons for the taboo on touching one's dead matrilineal kinsmen but also to the need for payment for these duties. One's paternal "relatives," actually the "strangers" with whom one's clan exchanged marital partners, would not be "close" enough to the dead person to have to fear his malevolence which was directed at matrilineal relatives. On the other hand, the long established system of mutual obligation maintained with another matriline had obligated them to undertake this duty for you.

We believe that the simple exchange of death duties was not adequate compensation for the duty because the potlatch was itself a reaffirmation of clan solidarity in the face of their mutual unconscious murderous desires. The potlatch man had to indebt himself to his clansmen, which permitted them to share in his expiation of guilt. It might also be possible that the distribution of the clan's goods permitted both a symbolic oral incorporation of the mother and by giving them away a denial of this incorporation. There may also have been elements of "spitting out" the "bad" incorporated mother. If we assume that the goods gathered together by the matrilineal clan could have been seen as mother's "good things" or representatives of the mother, who nonetheless was viewed ambivalently, this is a possible explanation. If this is so, it is much clearer why one would finally want to be "rid of her," i.e., spit her out.[11]

Finally, we have noted the competitive aspects of the potlatch as well as those which were directed toward the aggrandizement of the potlatch giver. In addition, Upper Tanana society was hierarchically organized, and deference to authority, whether of one's own matriline or of the chief, was strongly ingrained. We suggest that both elements of subservience toward authority and sibling rivalry are present here.

If we are correct in our assumption that Upper Tanana boys had difficulty resolving oedipal conflicts because of their proximity to the mother, it may well be that they identified with her to some degree. To do so would be to take a passive position vis-à-vis father, symbolically to be sexually receptive toward him. In fact, in earlier times, men were, by report, very deferent to their fathers.[12] The institution of the absolute chief also supports this notion. In addition, we have already discussed the presence of great sibling rivalry and attendant anxiety about that rivalry.

In light of this, we might see the potlatch giver as deferring to "fathers" or authorities and using subtle techniques for the derogation of brothers. Finally, if this were done subtly enough, the other could never really pinpoint it; that is, he could never really discover the giver's evil impulses.

THE LAW WAYS

If the potlatch was one institution in which social needs and pragmatic realities could be combined with an expression of basic psychodynamic concerns, the law system provided yet another.

Within the matrilineal family, the most important male made all decisions pertinent to the interior of the family. In conjunction with his age mates from other clans and the opposite moiety, he arranged marriages, organized potlatches, and maintained the matriline. The leadership of a band or village, or tribe, if you will, was first of all in the hands of these family elders. Together they made up the village council. Presiding over the village council and with a final authority from which there was no appeal was the chief.

The chieftainship, unlike the family, was patrilineally inherited. Because a boy took

This content downloaded from
137.229.131.9 on Fri, 11 Aug 2023 22:54:14 +00:00
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

his clan affiliation and hence his moiety affiliation from his mother, and because husband and wife could not belong to the same moiety, father and son were not members of the same clan. This patrilineal inheritance of the chieftainship functioned to accomplish three important ends. It provided that the chieftainship would alternate between the moieties thus averting jealousy, ensured that there would be clear continuity, and also made sure that the heir apparent could learn the role of chief at first hand from the man closest to him in real life.

If a chief should die without issue, the council of lineage heads would meet and select a new chief. In addition to the obvious need that the council would have to concern itself with political realities, two major criteria are uniformly reported to have guided their decision: (1) The chief must be a man with a reputation for considering the entire group and not merely his own matriline. (2) He must never be precipitate in his judgments. He must not "think too fast."

We have noted above the seeming extraordinary need for controls and balance in Athabascan culture. If, as we believe, the socialization experience produced an adult with a superego which was both very punitive due to trauma at a very early age connected with nurturance and omnipotence concerns, and yet filled with lacunae because of the "spoiling" by siblings, internal controls would tend to be very poor indeed. There would then, we assume, be a need for strong external controls, a need very clearly expressed in the legal system which was based upon three ruling assumptions. The chief acting in council had absolute authority from which there was no appeal. To be brought before this absolute authority signified guilt. The function of the legal process was to initiate restitution when possible or to impose banishment or the death penalty. Sentencing was very much dependent upon the state of conscience of the offender and his rank in the community.

Both the need for absolute external controls and the need for balance are expressed in this legal system. The authority is external and absolute. In operation, the authority had to consider with great care that its judgment did not create a violent disruption in the community, and that restitution to maintain the balance of reciprocal obligations was met.

No decisions about important matters were taken in haste. Concerning critical issues such as murder, deliberations might be continued for as long as five years. Deliberation also entered into the techniques for forgiveness and reintegration into the group. A man who was a convicted or confessed thief would have to fear that stigma for as long as ten years.

The specific kinds of offenses of greatest importance to Athabascans, and consequently those which were most likely to come before the chief and council, were adultery, theft, and murder.

Supposed adulterous partners were brought before the council by either the offending or offended matriline or both. Overtly, sexual jealousy was not the issue. The problem was seen as the breach of relationships between the clans. If the offenders refused to confess and ask forgiveness, they would be stripped and beaten, and the offended husband was permitted to kill the offender if he repeated his acts. Further, the offender had to pay damages to the offended husband.

The thief, if he stole from hunger, actually pointed the finger of shame at his matriline who should have been helping him. Unmitigated or unrepentant, on the other hand, he might be killed or banished (the equivalent of death), and in any event was expected to make restitution with the help of his matriline.

Murder was the most difficult problem, and there were various ways in which it might be handled. The complainants in a murder case were usually the matrilineal kinsmen of the victim. The task of the chief in such a case was either to get the kinsmen of the victim to accept a death payment from the killer, or to get the killer's matriline to accept that the killer himself should be put to death. If the matriline of the vic-

This content downloaded from
137.229.131.9 on Fri, 11 Aug 2023 22:54:14 +00:00
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

tim, after a hearing at which the murderer and various witnesses, if any were heard, was convinced to accept a death payment (weregild), the matter ended there. Such an outcome would result either if the victim was felt to have provoked the attack or to have been of much lesser importance than his killer. Among the considerations involved in making the judgment would be the importance and size of the killer's matriline. Even if they would accept the death penalty for one of their number, they might become unfriendly to the complainant group. In this event, a tension and imbalance in the mutual expectations and obligations might prove disastrous for the band as a whole.

If the victim's matriline demanded the death penalty and the chief concurred, the murderer was killed. Should he attempt to flee, he would be considered a fugitive and fair game for anyone who killed him.

The most serious complications occurred when a "good" man (influential, well thought of, and from a powerful family) murdered a man of similar stature. In such a case, if the offended matriline would not accept a death payment, and they usually would not, there was no way for a death penalty to be imposed. The offended matriline would feel it could not ask for the death of a "good" man, and the offending matriline would not willingly acquiesce in the capital punishment of one of their luminaries.

At such an impasse, all parties knew that war was impending. The offended matriline would contact all of its major family heads in all of the surrounding villages. Discussion would continue intermittently for up to five years to determine whether or not war should be initiated. Such a process could only realistically occur when the offender and his victim were not only from different clans but different bands (villages). Some solution short of war would be found for intra-village murder, since, if no solution could be found, it could lead to the splitting of a village and hence also inevitably to war.

Finally, if and when all the lineage heads in the clan and important men who were privy to the discussion were convinced in favor of war, the clan or lineage head most affected by the decision would be made war chief and preparations for war undertaken. There were no conscientious objectors to such wars. When the war chief called his men, a refusal to comply was punished by summary capital punishment.

There was no simple way out of such a war, which had the character of a war of extermination. Such wars ended with the destruction of one or another group or dragged on for a generation, finally to be ended only when memories died. But it was one of the reasons Athabascans feared each other. One could never know if a stranger were leading a war party or avenging an ancient almost forgotten wrong.

The law ways then provided a balanced and careful juridical process which permitted the social group to cohere even under extreme provocation. Perhaps more importantly, through the chief, they provided an external superego for the more or less hag-ridden Athabascans. Since the child rearing created an individual with a punitive superego and the "spoiling" as a child also produced superego lacunae of serious dimensions, Athabascans could not securely rely on internal controls.

When we remember that the young man was not considered an adult until he was thirty, we can see the distrust which Athabascans placed on internal control and the extended period of socialization they felt necessary to achieve maturity.

Thus, they developed an absolute chief. Nonetheless, it was an absolutism tempered by reality concerns. Life was hard for Athabascans, and anything that could avoid clashes between groups was vital to group cooperation and therefore group survival.

RESPONSES TO ACCULTURATION

If this was an integrated system, as we claim, it is of value to note how it has changed under acculturative pressure. It is our contention that this system, based on a fairly rigid personality type, could not en-

This content downloaded from
137.229.131.9 on Fri, 11 Aug 2023 22:54:14 +00:00
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

dure serious changes in its structure without massive personal disorganization on the part of its members. Apparently, this has happened.

The potlatch system, however vital for purposes of mutual support, was nonetheless an expression of creative as well as pragmatic needs. In the absence of the possibility of starvation with the advent of government transfer payments, the overt rationale has broken down. The victims have been older men who have spent their entire lifetimes preparing for an old age of power and plenty only to find their children no longer marrying into the right clan or under their control at all. Exchanges can no longer be fruitfully initiated since there is no certainty of eventual reciprocity.

But more seriously, there is now no very clear way to rid oneself of ghost fear after the death of a matrilineal relative. Many Athabascans admit to anxiety because they have not potlatched and the fear of ghosts is ubiquitous with no way of appeasing them. This is part, however, of a larger problem. The moral order, in the person of the authority of the chief, was nearly destroyed by change and with it all hope of easy control over Athabascan villagers.

Three events occurred one after the other which had a cumulative effect. Athabascans were Christianized by Episcopalians and Catholics. Both of these "high churches" stressed forgiveness for sins, and apparently were "sophisticated" in that they were not very punitive toward Athabascan wrong doers. U.S. law meanwhile abolished the power of the chief to impose capital punishment and substituted the state (territorial) troopers, whose infrequent visits meant that for all practical purposes no one was in charge and there was no law. Finally, the advent of alcohol and alcohol released anti-social behavior completely overloaded the badly weakened Athabascan legal system, which at its best could handle only a few cases per year.

Thus, Athabascans who needed a strong external authority system were denied one by benevolent religions and a weakened chief, then thrust into a situation where, by using alcohol, their tenuous controls against aggression and anti-social behavior were nearly totally collapsed.

Under these conditions, the unconscious hostility directed toward mother, siblings, and others but always kept under control by external authority or by taking the parental role under force, could no longer be contained. Once protected against sexual urges by late marriage (for men) and the opportunity for male companionship in the men's house, men are now face to face with their own open sexual desires and the teasing advances of women. Their responses tend to be violence (beating a woman and raping her) or retreat into drinking.

Inevitably, the collapse of these supportive systems of potlatching and social control exacerbated the difficulties Athabascans had in the acculturation situation. Unable to accumulate wealth because work was denied them in part by White prejudice, in part by a lack of training, and in part by drunkenness and anti-social behavior which made them poor employees, many Athabascan men became ne'er-do-wells. In addition, since the road to power within the group, the potlatch system, was becoming meaningless, there was no socially acceptable use of money to gain prestige. As we have noted, this fact was intertwined with the fact that money was not generally available. This general collapse of the cultural support systems meant that, by and large, many Athabascans became apathetic, alcoholic and aggressively destructive to themselves and others.

Yet the aboriginal Athabascan tendency to creatively organize emotional drives appears even now to reassert itself for the vast majority of Athabascans at about forty to fifty years of age. At this point, they cease fighting, raping, or drinking. In part, this is no doubt due to the reduction of sexual and aggressive drives. However, we feel it is more directly attributable to the restitution of external controls. At this age, Athabascan men and women customarily choose to interpret Episcopalianism or Roman Catholicism in

This content downloaded from
137.229.131.9 on Fri, 11 Aug 2023 22:54:14 +00:00
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

fundamentalist terms, or indeed to convert to fundamentalist Christianity. This strongly punitive religious system then apparently gives Athabascans the ability to reintegrate their lives creatively and take an active interest in their communities.

If fundamentalist Christianity has provided a system of social controls similar to that of aboriginal Athabascans and thus helped alleviate part of the cultural disintegration, present political realities are providing a framework to substitute for the potlatch. With the advent of Native political organization to attain a sizable settlement from the federal government for aboriginal land claims has come the development of local political "chiefs." Interestingly, the major function of such chiefs is to get federal and other moneys and disburse them to their constituencies, thus gaining power. Traditional rivalries and alliances once again are reemerging in this process.[1 3]

Although this latter process is not fully developed, it shows presently every indication of being another way in which traditional values and institutions are being recreated to solve contemporary problems. It might be said tentatively, then, that for Athabascans to acculturate most productively to contemporary society, they must first go back to being "more Athabascan." This is strongly suggestive of Jacques' (1957) findings in which he notes the importance of institutions to be the unconscious functions they serve. It has further implication for acculturation which we shall not discuss here.

Briefly, then, Athabascans faced with a harsh non-nurturant environment developed non-nurturance as a defensive tactic to cope with it, and, as a result, created serious fears and anxieties in the area of nurturance and aggression control. In turn, these were creatively organized and integrated into institutional behaviors which were socially useful. Faced with changes in these systems, the originally defended anxieties were allowed full expression resulting in massive personal and social pathology. Finally, by reinstituting a simulacrum of traditional institutions, some Athabascans have managed to cope once again with their own internal psychodynamic forces.

NOTES

[1] See DeVos and Hippler (1969) for a fuller discussion of the vicissitudes of such cross-cultural work.

[2] Apparently, the "third" moiety, usually of lower status than the other two, actually could exchange marital partners with both of the other two. This facilitated the sometimes complex inter-clan affiliation problems. Osgood (1937) discusses other aspects of this.

[3] Village groupings were and are much more complex than this and out of the scope of this paper.

[4] We are currently preparing with L. B. Boyer an analysis of the impact of the environment upon Athabascan personality.

[5] L. Bryce Boyer administered the Rorschach Psychodiagnostic test and Arthur Hippler administered the T.A.T. This research was supported by NSF Grant 653026 and NIMH Grant M-H-16338-01-1 RO3-MSM and by the Institute of Social, Economic and Government Research, University of Alaska.

[6] We have found such essential agreement on so many details of Athabascan life from so many Athabascans as to suggest that at least the behavioral framework within which potentially variant personalities might operate acted as a restraining influence at the very least, and certainly tended to mold various personalities into similar overt behaviors.

[7] Both the concerns with anal product and the fusion of anal, oral and sexual concerns are very clear in the Raven tale cycle of the Upper Tanana.

[8] The mythology is replete with overt, not merely symbolic, dentate vaginas. They actually chew off penes; in one case the villainess made a rope of such penes. She could only be overcome by ramming a burning four-foot log into her rapidly chewing vagina which had destroyed smaller logs. There is more than a hint of the penis being seen in this myth as a defensive weapon against women, a viewpoint supported by the violence between adult men and women which is nearly ubiquitous at present.

[9] A man may give a potlatch for his father who is in the opposite moiety at which time he acts *as if he were his father* and distributes gifts to his own matriline. He may also give a potlatch for his mother in which the gifts would be distributed to the

This content downloaded from
137.229.131.9 on Fri, 11 Aug 2023 22:54:14 +00:00
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

members of the other moiety, usually his father's lineage. Not only does this seem to reflect a kind of pragmatic flexibility, but also suggests that the exchange or "balance" is an important element in the ceremony.

[10] Sigmund Freud (1955) notes that one is prohibited from doing that which is at the same time deeply desired. He also notes that the difference between the sacred and the unclean is not clear in the primitive (infantile) emotional organization. The desire to kill the king, he notes, is the genesis of the fear of touching him.

[11] We have noted earlier that a man could also give a potlatch for his father, at which time he was acting *as if he were his own father.* Without belaboring the point, the denial of the paternal role and the taking of not merely the generalized paternal role but that of one's own father strongly suggest unresolved oedipal concern.

[12] The oldest informants note that men tended always to eat separately from women, cooking for themselves and spending much time in the men's house. This may suggest a desire to avoid mother, preferring the company of men to women as a defense, and even concerns about women's food as not nurturant. Honigmann (1954) notes a similar avoidance pattern for the Kaska and relates it to a deprivation of maternal affection.

[13] It is out of the scope of this paper to discuss acculturation in detail. We are currently preparing a series of monographs on the subject.

REFERENCES CITED

Boyer, L. Bryce, and Ruth M. Boyer
1967 A Combined Anthropological and Psychoanalytical Contribution to Folklore. Psychopathologie Africaine 3:333-372.

Boyer, Ruth
1962 Social Structure and Socialization Among the Apache of the Mescalero Indian Reservation. Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley.

Burton, George A., and J. W. M. Whiting
1961 The Absent Father and Cross Sex Identity. Merril Palmer Quarterly 7:85-95.

Devos, George, and Arthur E. Hippler
1969 Cultural Psychology: Comparative Studies of Human Behavior. *In* Handbook of Social Psychology (Second Edition). Gardner Lindzey and Elliot Aronson, Eds. Reading, MA: Addison Wesley. pp. 323-417.

Dundes, A.
1965 The Study of Folklore. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Freud, S.
1953 The Interpretation of Dreams. Standard Edition 4 and 5. London: Hogarth. [1900.]
1955 Totem and Taboo. Standard Edition 13:1-161. London: Hogarth. [1913.]
1957 The Unconscious. Standard Edition 19:3-68. London: Hogarth. [1923].
1961 The Ego and the Id. Standard Edition 19:3-68. London: Hogarth. [1923.]

Greenacre, Phyllis
1952 The Predisposition to Anxiety. *In* Trauma, Growth and Personality. P. Greenacre, Ed. New York: Norton. pp. 27-52. [1941.]

Helm, June
1968 The Nature of Dogrib Socioterritorial Groups. *In* Man the Hunter. Richard B. Lee and Irven DeVore, Eds. Chicago: Aldine.

Hippler, Arthur E.
1969 Popular Art Styles in Mariachi Festivals. American Imago 26(2):167-181.
1970 The Game of Black and White at Hunter's Point. Trans-action 7(6):56-63.

Hippler, Arthur E., L. B. Boyer, and Ruth M. Boyer
1973 The Psychocultural Significance of the Alaska Athabascan Potlatch Ceremony. *In* The Psychoanalytic Study of The Child.

Hippler, Arthur E., and Stephen Conn
1972 Traditional Athabascan Law Ways and Their Relationship to Contemporary Problems of "Bush Justice." University of Alaska I.S.E.G.R. Occasional Papers 7.

Honigmann, John J.
1954 The Kaska Indians: An Ethnographic Reconstruction. Yale University Publications in Anthropology 51. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Inkeles, Alex
1960 Industrial Man: The Relation of Status to Experience, Perception and Value. American Journal of Sociology 56:1-31.

Jacques, Elliott
1957 Social Systems as a Defense against Persecutory and Depressive Anxiety. *In* New Directions in Psychoanalysis. Melanie Klein, Paula Heinmann, and R. E. Money-Kyrle, Eds. New York: Basic Books.

Klein, Melanie, Paula Heinmann, and R. E. Money-Kyrle, Eds.

This content downloaded from
137.229.131.9 on Fri, 11 Aug 2023 22:54:14 +00:00
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

1957 New Directions in Psychoanalysis. New York: Basic Books.

Kluckhohn, C.
1942 Myths and Rituals: A General Theory. Harvard Theological Review 35:45-80.

Lewin, B. D.
1950 The Psychoanalysis of Elation. New York: Norton.

McKennan, Robert A.
1959 The Upper Tanana Indians. Yale University Publications in Anthropology 55. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Osgood, Cornelius
1937 The Ethnography of the Tanaina. Yale University Publications in Anthropology 16. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Roheim, Geza
1950 Psychoanalysis and Anthropology. New York: International Universities Press.

This content downloaded from
137.229.131.9 on Fri, 11 Aug 2023 22:54:14 +00:00
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms