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Stepdaughter Marriage

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I PROPOSE to examine a type of culture trait distribution which is characterized by a considerable degree of random scatter. Plotted on a map, it presents a shotgun appearance. As trait distributions have been worked out with increasing frequency and intensivity in the past forty years, ethnologists have come more and more, on the basis of experience, to expect traits to occur or to be absent in segregated areas: areas frequently irregular in contour or cutting across culture type boundaries, but nevertheless continuous. When on the contrary the occurrences were scattering, there has been a tendency to assume either that there once was a wider diffusion whose effects were subsequently lost in some intervening districts; or that the distribution was actually continuous, or practically so, but the record incomplete, so that gaps in knowledge caused a false impression of intermittent occurrence.

The trait to be considered cannot be explained in the latter way because there are some three times as many recorded instances of its non-occurrence as of its occurrence. In the Culture Element Survey of Native Western America conducted since 1934 by the University of California, a deliberate attempt was made in the fieldwork to determine trait absences as definitely as presences. Our original motivation perhaps was better statistical comparability; but it quickly became apparent that positive knowledge of "negative occurrences" was highly desirable for other purposes.¹ At any rate, the approach in the present paper is non-statistical.

The element to be dealt with here on the basis of the questionnaire list returns is Stepdaughter Marriage. This practice is well known from the Navaho: a man marries a woman and subsequently adds her daughter by another husband. Outside the Navaho, rather little attention has been given the custom. I ran across a case in northwest California and found a mention in the Mission period reports from central California. Beyond that, there seemed to be little information extant: ethnologists had not established the habit of thinking of the item. I therefore asked our fieldworkers to include it in their lists. Most of them did so; and while a few of them lost it again, returns on it appear from 12 of 20 fieldwork areas comprising 179 of 279 tribal or sub-tribal lists. Fortunately, the 12 blocks of lists dealing with the trait are geographically continuous. Of the 179 lists, some 22

* Clerical and drafting assistance by Works Progress Administration project 665-08-3-30, Unit A-15.

¹ For instance, the consistent *absence* from native America of iron, the wheel, the plow, proverbs, stringed instruments, etc., is universally conceded as significant, both theoretically and historically.

do not answer the item or answer it with doubt; 39 affirm the custom in some degree; 108 deny it explicitly, and for 10 others a negative may be inferred.² The distribution is shown on the map, and the groups admitting or rejecting the custom are listed herewith.

GROUPS ADMITTING MARRIAGE WITH STEPDAUGHTER

Comox
 Nanaimo
 Cowichan
 Makah
 Siuslaw
 Chilula
 Yurok, Lower: 1 or 2 cases known. (Driver's list entry is —)
 Yurok, Upper: considered undesirable. (Driver's list entry is —)
 Hupa: occasional, not desirable. (Driver's list entry is —)
 Kabledile Pomo
 Makahmo Pomo: after wife's death
 Shasta, Western: not disapproved
 Shasta, Eastern: not disapproved
 Klamath: rare
 Modoc: rare
 Achomawi, Western: not disapproved
 Wintu, Trinity: rare
 Wintu, Sacramento: rare and disapproved
 Wintu, McCloud: rare and disapproved
 Foothill Maidu: not disapproved
 Miwok, Northern, of Indian Diggings
 Miwok, Northern, of Pine Grove
 Entimbich Mono
 Yaudanchi Yokuts: probably
 Chumash of Santa Inez
 Walapai: common
 Yavapai, Northeastern: not frequent, but a recognized type
 Chiricahua Apache, Huachuca
 White Mountain Apache: sometimes
 Papago: sometimes, improper, but at loss to know how to prevent
 Navaho, Western
 Navaho, Eastern

² While, in the total Survey, groups outside California slightly outnumber those within—144 to 135—the areas where the item was ignored are almost wholly outside, so that the extra-Californian groups among which inquiry was made are somewhat fewer in number—72 against 117, or with deduction for one area in which negatives were mostly impossible to secure, 72 against 100.

Navaho, Northwestern, in San Juan Southern Paiute area
 Southern Paiute of San Juan drainage: recent, one case
 Southern Paiute, Kaibab
 Ute, Mōwats: one informant affirmed, one denied
 Ute, Uncompahgre
 Ute, Uintah

GROUPS DENYING MARRIAGE WITH STEPDAUGHTER

Pentlatch, Klahuse, Sechelt, Squamish
 Skokomish
 Tillamook, Galice Creek, Chetco, Tolowa
 Tolowa (another list), Lower Karok, Upper Karok, Chimariko, Wiyot, Nongatl,
 Mattole, Sinkyone, Kato, Coast Yuki
 Pomo groups: Buldam-Willits, Kacha, Shanel North, Icheche, Yokaia, Shanel
 South, Mukanno, Habenapo, Shigom, Koi, Elem, Northeastern
 River Patwin, Hill Patwin, Hill Wintun
 Eastern Achomawi, Atsugewi, Mt. Maidu, Valley Maidu, Mt. Nisenan, Foothill
 Nisenan, S. Nisenan
 Plains Miwok, N. Miwok of Westpoint, C. Miwok of Murphy, of Tuolumne, S.
 Miwok of Groveland, of Ahwahnee
 Mono groups: Northfork, Auberry, Tuhudwadj, Hodogida, Waksachi, Wopo-
 nuch (denied, but one occurrence is cited by neighbors)
 Yokuts groups: Chukchansi, San Joaquin, Chukaimina, Choinimini, Kocheyali,
 Nutunutu, Tachi, Paleuyami
 Bankalachi Tūbatulabal, Shoshone of Koso, of Saline, of Death Valley, Owens
 Paiute of Big Pine
 (Cent. California Coast, no explicit negatives; the lists were compiled from note-
 books and contain few negatives; but inferably probably absent among N.
 and S. Costano, Antoniano and Migueleño Salinan, Barbareño, Ventureño,
 and Emigdiano Chumash, Kitanemuk, Fernandefio, Gabrielino)
 Southern California: universal negative. Viz., Serrano, 5 Cahuilla groups, Cu-
 peño, 3 Luiseño, 6 Diegueño
 Yuma, Maricopa (Spier: occurs, but uninstitutionalized), Akwa'ala, Mexican
 Diegueño
 Pima, Papago (contradicts a "sometimes" in another list)
 Apache groups: N. Tonto, S. Tonto, San Carlos, Cibecue, Warm Springs Chiri-
 cahua, Mescalero, Lipan, Llanero Jicarilla, Ollero Jicarilla
 Pueblos: Walpi, Zuñi, S. Ana, S. Ildefonso
 Southern Paiute groups: Chemehuevi, Shivwits (2 lists), Antarianunts
 Pahvant Ute, Mōwats Ute (another list affirms), Deep Creek Gosiute

I have entered as an occurrence of the practice every possible case that could be so construed. About a dozen groups qualify with a statement such as: undesirable, disapproved, improper, only one case known, probably,

sometimes in recent times, after death of wife. Eight groups avow the custom as more or less standard and free from social disapprobation. There is evidently a series of tribes that dislike the practice, but are not offended seriously enough to forbid or prevent it. A fair estimate would seem to be that in the area in question perhaps 5-6 per cent of the groups recognize stepdaughter marriage as an institution; an additional 10-15 per cent accept it without much qualm; and perhaps another 10 per cent disapprovingly tolerate occasional instances; whereas the great majority of groups prohibit it entirely at least in theory and often no doubt effectively prevent it.

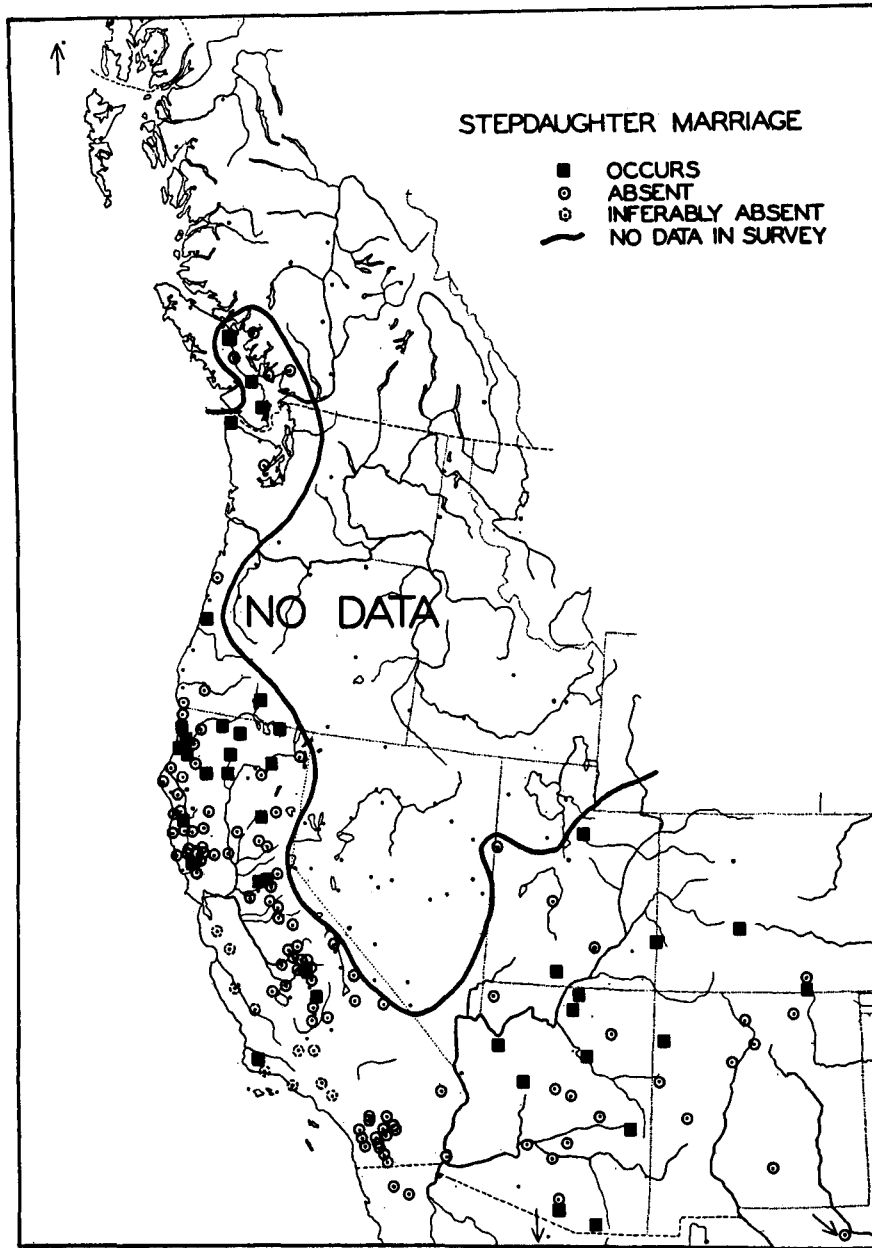
What is most significant about the distribution remains its scatter. (See map 1.) True, there are three areas of concentration of occurrence: among the Coast Salish, in northern California, and in an area centering around the Navaho.³ There is also a solid negative area in southern California.⁴ However, there is no region in which the practice is universal; and none of any size in which the custom fails to crop up. Groups that institutionalize, tolerate, disapprove, or forbid this form of marriage live in close proximity to one another. It is as if the natives of western North America had been unable to make up their minds on the point: in general they were averse but with no great decisiveness, so that every so often the practice developed and occasionally even got full sanction.

From the point of view of the total culture of the area this indecisiveness is the most significant feature of the trait. Aversion to stepdaughter marriage clearly predominated, but in general it was not strong enough to become part of a primary pattern of the culture. As for the tribal cultures, which after all are not permanently separate entities but only transient local facies of the larger underlying culture, it is evident that their histories on this point are likely to have been extremely fluctuating. It is entirely possible that two centuries ago the Navaho frowned severely on the practice; equally possible that they developed it themselves or learned to tolerate it from Ute, Paiute, or Yuman neighbors. With the attitude of the comprising culture so ambiguous and presumably changeable, it is apparent that a reconstruction of any longer tribal history as regards the custom must be precarious almost to the point of hopelessness.

We are dealing, then, with one of the unstable elements of culture, and its interest lies in its instability. It is, however, of a different order from culture features whose change is the result of growth of a style or of fashion

³ Two or three groups each of Ute, Southern Paiute, Plateau Yumans, and Apache, in addition to all the Navaho questioned.

⁴ Which however has long been Catholicized.



MAP 1.

impulses. Stylistic change is due to growth in the direction of fulfillment of a style pattern which at first is unformed and perhaps latent or implicit, later so explicit as to tend to be restrictive of everything but repetition. Fashion changes involve variation for its own sake. They also operate within a pattern, of course, but with the impulses toward novelty or variety *per se* predominating over impulses toward consistent trend in one direction. Stepdaughter marriage, in distinction from both, belongs to a class of elements which are unstable not because there is inherent impulse toward change, but because cultures find it difficult to commit themselves between alternatives.⁵

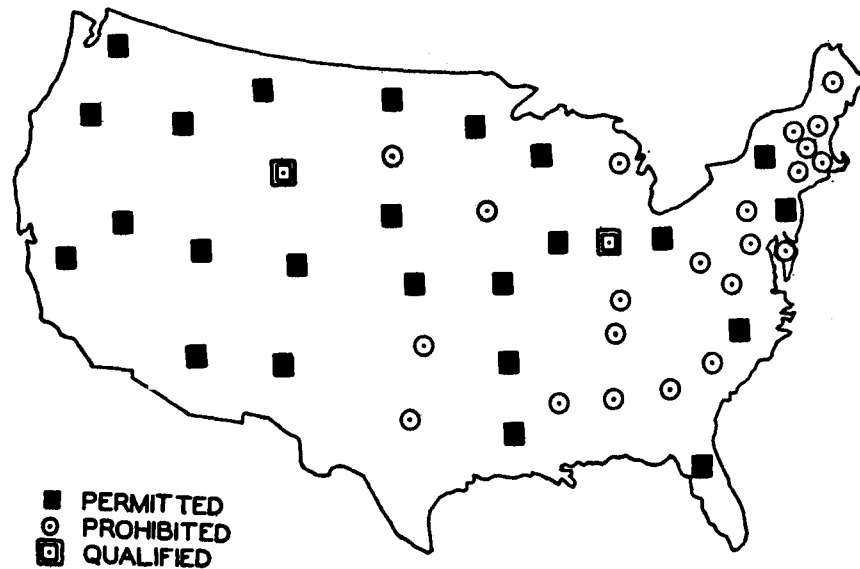
It is easy to see why this should be so. Whatever the choice, there is always a good argument to the contrary. Much as with the choice between patrilineal, matrilineal, and bilateral descent, we are in a field where logics meet and there are pulls in diverse directions. If the formulated principle of a culture is that one does not marry blood relatives, or near blood relatives, and this principle overshadows all others, the stepdaughter is eligible in marriage. The principle need not however exclude others. It may in fact be held to with so much affect as to become obsessive and be extended to quasi or pseudo-relatives: the affinal ones, whom we also call "relatives" though they are not kin. One normally lives with his affinals, or at least in definite and important relations with them, more or less as one lives in relations with his kin; in primitive society as in our own. There is reason accordingly, even if not exclusive logic, for treating them similarly. Moreover, my affinals or their children are the blood kin of my children, and it is an intelligible motivation if I lean backward a bit and make their attitude retroactive upon myself. If on the other hand the situation is such as to make stepdaughter marriage economically convenient and profitable, and perhaps even socially consolidative, the scruples may be quickly brushed

⁵ Mead has a similar interpretation of the related phenomenon of mother-daughter marriage in the last paragraph of her *The Mountain Arapesh, I: An Importing Culture* (Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History, Vol. 36, Part 3, 1938). "This extreme diversity is such that every small group is always differentiated in some slight measure from the others which have either not yet received or have already rejected some one of its special usages. . . . There were two cases in the [Arapesh] hamlet of Ahalesimihi of men who married mother and daughter; in each case the man married the daughter first and a young widowed mother 'followed the daughter' and became a kind of subsidiary second wife. This was a new way of doing things; the first case was undoubtedly due to accident, the second was conditioned somewhat by the acceptance of the first, and now the men of surrounding hamlets spoke, three years after the second aberrant marriage, of this as a 'fashion of Ahalesimihi,' which might be expected to continue. Once focussed in the public eye as the trait of a hamlet, it may spread as outside elements commonly spread; although this is not as likely because of the low prestige of any indigenous [Arapesh] traits as opposed to the trait known to be of outside origin."

aside by the literal logic of the primary principle that marriage is with non-kin.

Advanced peoples similarly set up and discard scruples. A Catholic may not marry a goddaughter. An Orthodox Russian may not marry any affinal: sister exchange would be incest. Within our memory England repealed a statute which pronounced marriage with a dead wife's sister a felony.

Curiosity led me to secure the data for the forty-eight states of this country.⁶ The results (map 2) are analogous to those from our western



STEPDAUGHTER MARRIAGE

MAP 2.

indigenes, although we permit this form of marriage somewhat more frequently and the distribution shows somewhat more segregation. The East and South on the whole dislike affinal marriage enough to forbid it, for historic reasons that will be evident to any one who knows Americans. The West no doubt also harbors much sentiment against the practice, but mostly not sufficient to impose legal prohibition. Nevertheless there are Western states that forbid and Eastern and Southern ones that allow step-

⁶ C. G. Vernier, *American Family Laws*, Vol. I (1931).

daughter marriage. There is sectional preponderance but no clear-cut segregation. Twenty-four states allow, 22 forbid, 2 hedge with a curious qualification: one may marry his stepdaughter, but extra-marital relations with her are specified as punishable—evidently as the result of two-minded compromise.

Obviously there are other impingements besides logic. Where monogamy is insisted on, the whole problem is out, except for the residual question of permissibility after a wife's death. Where the levirate and sororate are favored or made an obligation, there is opportunity for successive affinal marriage to be extended to simultaneous affinal marriage; and if the society is already polygynous, the extension is but a slight step. With sororal polygyny in vogue, it is difficult to see on what ground stepdaughter marriage could be banned, unless there were a strong feeling that marriage must not transcend generations; which again is quite conceivable. On the other hand, to the Pueblos the ideas of both polygyny and levirate-sororate are definitely repugnant, so that their prohibiting stepdaughter marriage is consistent and expectable; a very special factor or combination of circumstances would be needed to bring about their allowing an exception to their fundamental attitudes.

Where, on the other hand, as in much of native Australia and Melanesia, the primary assumption is that one does marry kindred, other factors are likely to be the determining ones: which particular kindred, for instance, are the right and wrong ones; and the rules on this again we know to be highly variable locally.

In short, so many cultural paths lead through the domain of stepdaughter marriage—and no doubt through innumerable analogous ones—that the decision which any given society makes is likely to be the function of a number of influences of fluctuating strength, and therefore to be difficult to predict or to reconstruct for the past.

It would be lengthy to review here the co-occurrences with polygyny, sororal or otherwise, post-mortem sororate, cross-cousin marriage, and other relevant institutions. I will however present the Survey data on another specific item: marriage with the wife's brother's daughter. One would expect this to occur more widely. The wife's niece is not quite so close as her daughter, and she is normally reared in a separate familial household. The sense of incestuousness of the relation would therefore be somewhat less likely to come up, or be more easily overcome. For some areas this item was not inquired into in the Survey: Northwestern, North-eastern, Coastal Central California, the Ute-Paiute, Yuman-Piman, and Pueblo-Apache regions. Where both traits were in the list, however, there are regularly some groups which allow the wife's brother's daughter while

forbidding the wife's daughter; whereas all that permit the daughter also permit the niece. These additional groups are:

- Gulf of Georgia: Pentlatch, Squamish
- Oregon Coast: Chetco (probably)
- Pomo Area: River Patwin
- Miwok: three Central and Southern groups
- Mono: Waksachi
- Yokuts: Chuckchansi, San Joaquin, Chukaimina, Kochejali, Nutunutu, Paleuyami
- Owens Paiute: Independence
- Shoshone: Koso

For the areas represented, this makes 10 groups permitting marriage with the stepdaughter, 26 with wife's brother's daughter. In all these districts except the first, stepdaughter marriage is definitely sporadic. Where it appears more frequently, as in northern California and the northern Southwest, the increment of tribes allowing marriage with the wife's brother's daughter would presumably be proportionally smaller.

In another study, in press at the University of California, I have compiled the Survey data on a series of items relating to salt, dogs, and tobacco. For some of these traits the distributions come out well segregated and outline fairly clear histories of areal development. For other traits the distributions are more or less segregated but multiple, or scattering as in the instance here discussed. Such are seaweed eating, roasting salt from grass, salt taboos on particular occasions, dog eating, tobacco planting, dilution, offerings. Some of these are conditioned by local environment, but many are clearly not. The utility of most of these trait distributions for historical inference is obviously limited. Yet they frequently help to reveal the quality and strength of cultural attitudes. This is one moral of the present exposition: that the value of distributions is not merely for historical speculation. As Lowie has said, a cultural item alone is not yet an ethnological datum; it begins to be such only when it has a geographical association. I am ready to take the next step: distributions are as valuable for full understanding of pattern and functional situations, for discrimination of what is fundamental from what is incidental, as they are for historical reconstruction. And as to speculation—well, this obviously can equally well be logical, functional, or historical. The difference of better and worse as regards speculativeness is not in subject matter or type of interest, but in pertinent evidence available, the critical quality with which this is handled, and in knowing where to stop.

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