

THE CHEYENNE WOMEN

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The Cheyenne Indian culture discussed in the following paper was that belonging to these nomads of the Plains in what was probably their most characteristically stable period of existence at this stage of their culture. I will fix two descriptive boundaries to this period of history. This was a time after the Cheyenne people had established the nomadic pattern of following the buffalo across the Plains. The introduction of the horse had facilitated this adaption of their previous semi-sedentary life style. This was a time before the active entrance of the white person's patterns in a way that eventually resulted in the destruction of the Cheyenne ways. The Cheyenne culture within these borders of its own history was most characteristic of its own time and place. Its cultural and environmental adaptations were uninterrupted by strong foreign influences.

My main concern in the following pages is with what being a Cheyenne woman meant in this period of tribal history (1840-60). In this search for evidence of Cheyenne women, I have approached the Cheyenne culture through the aspects of social organization, economic organization, the political structure, women's ties outside the domestic unit, the women's position in the greater religious ceremonies and supernatural expressions of the Cheyenne, and the self concepts and cultural personality traits of these women. As will be noted later, some more major aspects of Cheyenne life are not mentioned in great detail because of the exclusion of women from these activities.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

In looking at the social organization of the Cheyenne, I will briefly discuss some structural components as these relate to women. The basic social units are the family, kindred, and band. The kindred is a unit of organization within one of the ten Cheyenne bands; the family a unit within the kindred. The family and the kindred are of most importance here as the study of these involves the study of courting and marriage rituals, residence and descent patterns, norms regarding various relationships, and the socialization of the children; and brings attention to social roles and activities of women.

The marriage arrangement was a joining of two families and as such required careful consideration. The males of the young girl's family, usually the girl's brother, had the final determination. Various rituals were entailed in sending the message from the suitor to the girl's family. Hoebel, in his account of marriage as a formal and serious matter, states that "Cheyenne courting is a bashful and long, drawn-out affair. It usually takes four or five years for a young man to win his bride, and when he is ready to put the question it is directed to her family and not to the girl...In time they may exchange rings...They are then engaged. Except for the exchange of rings, a suitor rarely gives presents directly to a girl. When the time comes these go to her male relatives" (Hoebel 1960:21). Often the brother was the one with power of decision regarding

the marriage of his young sister. This relationship is one of both great power and great restraint. "Although they may play together as small children, beginning at puberty they must shed all manifestations of familiarity. There can be no physical contacts or joking between them...So great is this authority, and so serious an affront to a young brave's ego is its flaunting, that if a sister disobeys his word, a brother may actually commit suicide (and there have been such cases). In such a case, the girl is disowned by her family" (ibid.: 26-7). The brother-sister relationship retained importance throughout life. "Wives' rights to a man's loyalty take precedence over his sister's, but a sister is not cut off entirely by his marriage" (ibid.:79). This is indicative of the many formalities and considerations by which the Cheyenne regulate important relationships for group cohesion.

Grinnell gives an account of the request for the marriage of a girl, later noting that a horse might be requested in the same way.

"In old times, when they went on the warpath, if a man wanted a girl for his wife, he might cut from a tree a slab of wood, draw on it the figure of a girl, and also whatever he wished to give for the girl, such as horses, bridles, a war-bonnet, and other articles. Having completed the picture, he sent it by another young man to the war-lodge in which the girl's brother or cousin slept. The messenger handed it to the brother, and after he looked at it, he was likely to send for any of his brothers who might be with the party. To them he showed the slab of wood, and told them who had sent the offer for this sister. If all agreed to the marriage, another picture of the girl was drawn on the slab, with figures of whatever they were willing to offer in return for his presents, and the piece of wood was returned to the suitor. After the party had

returned to the main village, he sent to the girl's lodge the things represented in his drawings, and the young people of the other war-lodge sent what they had drawn, with the girl, to his lodge." (Grinnell 1962:27).

There seems to have been some flexibility in the rigid ritual formulations the Cheyennes provided for interaction. The narrative of a Southern Cheyenne woman's account of how she came to be married shows some of the same ritual, but a personal individuality is also present.

"After I reached the age of young womanhood, I was not single much longer. One afternoon I was visiting my girl chum. When I came home that evening there were a number of old men in my father's tipi; I also noticed much fresh meat. I asked my mother what it was all about, and what those old men were here for. She said, 'My daughter, these men are here to deliver a message, asking the consent of your father that you marry a male of their family. And I want to tell you that your father has consented. However, he will speak to you later.' My father said to me, 'My daughter, these men have come here to ask my consent to your marriage. Five horses and other things will be sent over in the morning. I have consented. Now I myself want to hear what you think.' I made no reply. I was frightened. But at any rate, the horses were brought over the next morning. My male relatives were called to select their horses, but before doing that they called me in and asked me what I thought. My paternal uncle started to talk to me saying how well my parents had brought me up, and stated that marriage by purchase was considered one of the greatest and happiest events in one's life. He said, 'I know that this is your father's desire. As you can see, he is getting on in years. His eyesight is not very good. This young man will look after the necessary work for your father. However, we do not wish to do anything against your will. Now, let us hear from you.' I then said to them, 'Since my father has consented to the offer of marriage by purchase, I also agree to the proposed marriage. I love my father, and whatever he deems best for me, that I will do. I cannot refuse my father's wishes for those reasons'. They were all glad to hear me, showing it by their sincere approval.

They then proceeded to select their own horses, one at a time. They were all good saddle horses. They in turn gave their own horses. My people saddled one of the horses on which I rode over to my future husband's people, leading the four other horses. My future husband's women folk met me near their camps and I dismounted. They carried me on the blanket the rest of the way, and let me down at the entrance of my future husband's tipi. I walked in and sat beside him. This young man was no sweetheart of mine; he was a stranger to me; he never had come to see me when I was still single. I wondered if I would learn to love him in the future. After some little time the women brought in many shawls, dresses, rings, bracelets, leggings, and moccasins. They then had me change clothes. They braided my hair and painted my face with red dots on my cheeks. When I was completely arrayed in my marriage clothes I was told to return to my people. My husband's women folk carried the balance of my clothing to my tipi. In the meantime, my mother and aunt had prepared a large feast. Towards evening my own tipi was erected. The cryer called in a loud voice inviting all my husband's relatives, naming my husband as the host. My husband came over with his male relatives. While there they told jokes, and some related their war exploits; still others narrated funny things that had happened to them in the earlier days" (Michelson 1932:5-7).

These different accounts of marriage details point to both a ritual rigidity and an allowance for some personal individual flexibility. The Cheyennes placed great importance on structuring relationships and interactions that might be a potential source of conflict. In this situation, romantic love has no bearing on marriage choices, and though the girl is asked for consent, I wonder what the reaction might have been had she refused the request. Her relatives may have been considerate of her emotions, but it would be quite customary if they had ignored her wishes. It was generally realized that "Husbands and wives, although they are diffident in their attitudes toward each other in

the early stages of their marriages, usually become most fond of each other. They form a close working team with a strong sense of family responsibility...Such was the ideal life between husbands and wives, although, of course, it did not always work out thus" (Hoebel op.cit.:24).

The new conjugal family thus formed becomes part of the greater kindred group. "It is the girl's mother's privilege to provide a new tipi and its furnishings. Relatives from both sides help with many contributions. When all is ready, the Lodge is set up, usually in the vicinity of the bride's mother's lodge" (ibid.:2). The kindred group customarily camps together within the band encampment. "As a settlement, it consists of the Lodge (or lodges, if the family head has several wives) of the family head, plus the lodges of his daughters and their husbands, and other relatives. The sons-in-law are expected to be the main providers of meat for all the group, which is cooked in the mother's lodge and carried by the daughters to their own tipis for eating" (ibid.:22). A kindred group has many customary modes of conduct between various members according to their status. Here as in other tribes the mother-in-law tabu existed. "Although they live so near, the sons-in-law are expected nonetheless to avoid seeing their mother-in-law, and under no circumstances should they speak directly to her" (ibid.).

Cheyenne men practiced polygamy "but tribal customs often controlled the selection of additional wives. When a second wife was taken, she was usually related to the first and was

often her younger sister. Sororate marriages, although not compulsory, added strength to the enlarged circle of relations...Old Cheyennes explained that if the second wife was not related to the first, trouble would develop and the older woman was likely to leave her husband's lodge. Few men, if any, took more than five wives because of limitations of wealth and food" (Berthrong 1963:38-39). Thus sisters were encouraged to grow up closely, early harmony being important, since frequently they remained together during their entire lives. Again, this arrangement takes a situation of potential conflict and by cultural norms encourages internal cohesion.

Division of Labor

The Cheyenne society creates a firm division between male and female roles. This can be seen in terms of a division between the public and the domestic spheres of activity (Rosaldo and Lamphere 197:39). Women's activities are centered around the home and home-related ventures, for the most part. Men appear to spend much of their time at war, or preparing for it, doing tribal and personal business, engaging in various religious activities, or hunting. "While women gather vegetable foods and make the home and its accoutrements, men bring home the meat, make weapons, wage war, and perform the major part of the necessary rituals" (Hoebel op.cit.:64). Thus women deal mainly with the home and men have many outside (public) roles. The men's work is considered more important: bringing home the meat, war activities as well as carrying out the major renewal ceremonies. The women's work involves the more day to day necessities of living. Some special value was attributed to certain activities,

though it seems minimal in contrast to the cultural values of men's activities. "The work of women devoted to ceremonial decorations upon robes, lodges, or other articles was considered highly important and corresponded to men's bravery and success in war" (Berthrong 1963:37). The making of a new home was also given recognition as an achievement in a ritual of dedication wherein the outstanding warriors counted coup on it. (Hoebel op.cit. 63).

Women are responsible for child care, though the extended kinship system seems to ease the mother's responsibilities. Grandmothers and aunts help with various duties of child care and socialization. In a tribe where new members are an asset to survival, children are highly valued by both their parents and the tribe. "From the outset their lives are made as comfortable as possible. They are strictly taught and steadily but gently molded toward the Cheyenne ideal in an atmosphere of love and interest. The Cheyenne child is rarely punished, and daughters may react in suicide if their mothers are overly harsh or vindictive after they have grown up" (Hoebel, op.cit.91).

Socialization

Cheyenne mothers use a cradleboard, "a wooden frame carried on the mother's back and on which is a laced-up animal-skin 'cocoon' in which the infant is tightly bound like a mummy" (Although the baby is not put in the cradleboard until several weeks old, the advantages of mobility for the mother are easily seen.) The mother may "go about her work with an assurance that her baby will not get into trouble. If traveling, or watching advance or ceremony, she carries the board like a knapsack;

when working in the lodge, she hangs it upright from one of the lodge poles; when working outside the lodge, she leans it against the lodge covering" (Hoebel, op.cit.91).

Socialization of the Cheyenne children begins when they are very young, and is clearly differentiated by sex even at an early age.

"Cheyenne children are little replicas of their elders in interests and deed. Children begin to learn adult activities and practice them in play at incredibly early ages. Boys learn to ride almost as soon as they learn to walk, girls soon after. At two or three, they ride with their mothers, and by the time they are five or six, little boys are riding bareback on their own colts and mastering the use of the lasso. By seven or eight they can help with the herding of the camp's horses. Little girls, as soon as they can toddle, follow their mothers to gather wood and bring in water, the mothers patiently helping them with their pint-sized burdens. Boys get small, but good quality, bows and arrows as soon as they can effectively learn to use them... (ibid.:92).

Women are largely responsible for socialization of the girls, but not the boys.

"Mothers continually admonish, exhort, and train their daughters. Fathers are friendly with their sons, but do little about their education until they are of age; boys are pretty much on their own and learn from each other until it is time to go on the warpath...Cheyenne boys normally join their first war party when only fourteen or fifteen years of age. They are solicitously watched over by the older men and are not expected actively to engage in fighting, but they get their taste of danger and accumulate experience early" (ibid.:27-70).

Thus, women are responsible for child care and early socialization of the boys, and are seen to perform "lower level conversions from nature to culture;" while the men take over the socialization of the boys when a higher, more culturally important level of activity is reached (cf. Ortner, P. 80).

Mothers have special interests in their daughters and teach them the activities of women.

"My mother taught me everything connected with the tipi, such as cooking and tanning hides for different purposes. The first pair of moccasins I made were for my father. 'You are very good in making moccasins,' he said with a smile. My mother would show me how to twist the sinews, and how to cut the soles and uppers of the moccasins for different sizes. I became very competent in this work at an early age" (Michelson, op.cit.4).

However, other members of the kinship group also play a part in this socialization. The strength of the brother-sister relationship was noted earlier. This relationship is an important one for the children of the brother.

"It is a father's sister who has the freer relation to a child. She makes the infant's cradle and gives it gifts throughout life. She lightly teases the children in a way a mother never does...All in all, the relation of children, both male and female, to their father's sister is free of the formal restraints they are made to feel toward their mother...Mother's sisters are 'mothers' and treated accordingly. A maternal uncle has much the same relationship to his nieces and nephews, again emphasizing the importance of the brother-sister relationship" (Hoebel, op.cit.27).

The father's sister takes a very active part in the socialization of a young woman in relationships with men: "My aunt (father's sister) had heard that a certain young man had begun to look upon me seriously. She came over and began to tell me what to say and how to act in the presence of this young man" (Michelson, op.cit.4).

Summary

The social organization has one particularly strong feature for women: women stay near their families after marriage, retaining life-long relationships in their own kinship groups.

However, the position of women is weakened by the cultural strength of the power of the brother over the sister, as well as other males' power over women. Women's activities are not given as much value as the activities of men. Women are restricted mostly to a domestic domain, while the men operate in a public domain.

ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION

The economic organization of a culture concerns material resources and the values and attitudes associated with the means and relations of production. The Cheyenne lived basically in a subsistence hunting and gathering economy, their main concerns being provisions for survival. The buffalo provided most of their material needs; vegetables and fruits, and small game completing their diet. Their survival depends mostly on environmental factors and their skill in adapting to the environment:

"Though the Cheyennes provision themselves with a fair variety of food that gives a reasonably well-balanced diet, and their techniques and skills are of a high order, they still live under the feast or famine conditions, and famine is never forgotten" (Hoebel, op.cit.67).

The nomadic life style and environment of the Cheyenne did not deal with accumulations of wealth as such in an economic structure. Horses were used as gifts and their value must have been high: often raiding parties would go out to steal horses from other tribes. The Cheyenne policy of giving gifts reflects their attitude toward wealth. "It is not to be hoarded or to be self-consumed...Its value derives from its being given away" (Hoebel, op.cit.94). However, there were advantages to be gained

through the giving of gifts, as was seen in the "purchase" of the bride, though these gifts were often reciprocated by the original receiver.

The main direction of economic activities was toward providing food and material needs of the people.

"Occupying several tipis and camping together, the extended family was the primary economic unit within the Cheyennes and was well adapted to the hunting nomadic life on the Plains. The extended family contained several hunters and enough women to dress the hides and preserve the meat during the more bountiful hunting season" (Hoebel, op.cit. 45-46).

Thus, though men and women cooperate in economic ventures, the men are primarily hunters (mostly buffalo) and the women gather vegetables and fruits, gather firewood and fetch water, as well as providing housing and clothing for the family.

At one time the Cheyenne had cultivated gardens, but during this time (before introduction of the horse ca. 1760) supplemented their diet through foraging.

"Of the wild plants gathered by the women for their family larder, some sixteen varieties are fruits, eight or ten are roots, and a dozen to fifteen are vegetable stalks or buds. Many of them add variety to boiled meat dishes or a nourishing quality to soups. The Cheyennes do not bake or fry breads made of plant flour" (Hoebel, op.cit.60).

Women and girls gather roots, their task having a tool that had both practical and sacred significance:

"The dibble, or digging stick, is their basic tool. It was given by the Great Medicine Spirit and it figures in the ritual paraphernalia of the Sun Dance, for it has its sacred aspects. Cheyenne dibles are of two types. The short kind has a knob at one end and is pushed under the desired root by pressure against the stomach when the digger is down on both knees; the other kind is long, and used as a crowbar. The sharp ends are fire hardened" (Grinnell, op.cit.166).

The women's tasks of root and berry gathering also had social aspects which made them less routine. The women would leave camp in the morning in a group, often with a few men "whose chief purpose was to stand guard and scan the country to detect the possible approach of strangers, or, if enemies unexpectedly made their appearance, to wait behind and fight them off, so that the women might escape" (*ibid.*). The women in the small work parties did not treat root digging as a tiresome chore:

"Their spirits are usually gay, for they look on the day's activity as an outing. Far out on the prairie they scatter to their individual tasks, for the actual gathering requires no cooperative effort. When they come together in the late afternoon, they often react to the monotony of their work by gambling their roots against each other in a game of seeing who can throw her digging stick the farthest, or by throwing 'dice' of buffalo metacarpals" (Hoebel, *op.cit.*:166).

The primary objects owned by women in connection with their economic contributions were the tools they used for their work. The digging stick, already mentioned, was given a cultural significance. Another basic functional tool was the stone maul.

"The basic household item of the women is her stone maul - an oval river stone with pecked out grooves on the short sides around which is fixed a supple willow firmly fastened with green rawhide. With the maul she breaks up fuel, drives tipi pegs, and crushes large bones to be cooked in soup" (*ibid.*:62).

The buffalo hide processing was an important task with special tools and knowledge required. "Each woman has a tanning kit of four tools: a scraper, flesher, drawblade, and softening rope or buffalo scapula (shoulder blade)" (*ibid.*:62). Often part of the tanning tools would be passed down from mother

to daughter.

Though the women's economic activities were of crucial importance to survival, the men's contribution of hunting the buffalo, though also crucial, was given considerably more cultural significance as "men's work". Women were excluded from this crucial economic activity and status except in more menial aspects. They did not share the active excitement of hunting the animal. Men also had the opportunity to participate in raiding parties to steal horses, an economic asset.

Both male and female activities rely on cooperation and working together. When men want to solicit aid in a venture, such as a war party, they let their plans be known and then take a pipe to the men they select. If the man accepts the pipe and smokes it, he accepts the initiator's request. If the man does not want to participate in the venture, he lets the pipe pass. Women also solicit help for some ventures, such as making a lodge, which is a big undertaking:

"A small lodge requires eleven buffalo cowhides, thinned and tanned. A big lodge takes as many as twenty-one. A woman does all the work on her lodge skins up to the point of the rope or blade-softening process. For this last step she invites in her friends and relatives - one for each hide - and gives them a big feast. Each one is then given a hide to take home to finish, with a rawhide rope to use for the work. Meanwhile, she has to split and make quantities of thread from the buffalo sinews she has been hoarding. Her next chore is the preparation of another great feast, for the process of cutting and sewing the lodge is an all-day sewing-bee to which all her friends will bring the hides she has parceled out to them.

"At daybreak she must first seek out a woman known as an expert lodge maker, to whom she supplies paint and a cutting knife. Before the guests arrive, the lodge maker fits the pieces and marks them for cutting. The sewers subsequently arrive for breakfast and work all day long, with a meal in the afternoon and a supper at night - this last after the lodge has been raised and stretched on its foundation. For their pains, the expert lodge maker receives a small present" (ibid.:62-63).

Men are provided by the culture with a ritualistic means of undertaking almost every venture. The female's gathering on the other hand, seems to have been instigated in a much less formal manner, as a request to female kin and other women.

Though women contribute vitally to the economy and survival and some attention is given to their contribution by cultural expressions and ritual, male activities are given more prestige than those of the female. There is a sharp division of labor and corresponding different values are given to the work activities of the different sexes. In their strategies of recruitment, men more often use rituals, while the women gather help in more informal ways. Though the men are absent from the camp for periods of time for war and for the communal hunt, these activities are essential to the domestic unit and are given much prestige. The women are left with all domestic duties, while the men's activities are in the public domain. The men have access to economic gains (horses) and the power that goes with them within the means that wealth has for the Cheyenne.

POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

The importance of the political structure of the Cheyenne correlates with the high value these people placed upon law.

"The Cheyenne concern with the threat of internal disruption and their compensatory drive toward tribal supremacy and unity on all crucial matters have resulted in the centralization of legal control in the tribal council and the military societies" (ibid.:49).

Both the tribal council and the military societies were male affairs, women taking no part in these decision making groups. Most of the decisions of these groups were those that affected men, and women, of course, indirectly. "The bulk of the Cheyenne law is public law: the heart of Cheyenne law focuses on murder and the control of the communal hunt; disputes over property are rare, adultery and wife stealing rarer" (ibid.:49). So, though women had no part in the formal authority, they were still influenced in parts of their lives. The most obvious distinction indicating sex-related (and hence, status related) differences of rights are those pertaining to divorce. Often, in societies where women have little status, they have no option of divorce, while the husband can easily dispose of his wife. Formally, at least, the Cheyenne woman has an easily available exit from a marriage she is unhappy with. "A woman divorces her husband simply by moving back into her parents' tipi" (ibid.:27). This exit is perhaps so easily allowed because the woman does not leave the kinship group when she marries, she keeps her ties with her family, and no bride price must be returned if she leaves her husband.

A man may divorce his wife by drumming her away at the so-called Omaha Dance. At one point in the dance, those men who have drummed a wife away dance as a group.

"A man who wants publicly to shame his wife may join them. At the end of the dance he strikes the drum, crying 'I throw her away'. When a man is made a leader of the Omaha Dance, the greatest gesture he can make is to throw his sister away. It was like giving away a fine horse, only more so. In contrast to a wife so divorced, the sister is supposed to be highly honored. When a brother strikes the drum, he throws the stick among the men, and the man whom it hits becomes the sister's husband" (ibid.:27).

The contrast between the wife and the sister is included as one more indicator of the authority of the brother over the sister.

The Cheyenne law directly affects women in the attitudes and consequences of abortion and suicide. Abortion, which presumably is not frequent since a high value is placed on children, is homicide within the meaning of Cheyenne law. An unborn fetus has a legal personality as a Cheyenne. Its death through abortion brings the full penalty on its mother. (ibid.:53). Suicide is also viewed as homicide, but a curious distinction exists between the suicidal acts of men and women. Men can let the enemy kill them in battle (this was noted, in a case of man with an illness and a brother whose sister had flaunted his authority) and "Their post mortem reward is glory, not disapproval. Direct suicide is a protest act of girls and women, and for both, the protest is an expression of grievance within the conjugal family" (ibid.53).

Societal reaction to female suicide follows two lines in the following examples:

"A woman who hangs herself because her husband brings home a second wife is said to be foolish for killing herself over such a little thing. Second wives are normal. However, in two cases in which mothers abused and beat their daughters who then committed suicide, the women were mobbed and then exiled" (ibid.:53).

Since women have little authority or formal power among the Cheyenne, it might be suspected that they influence decisions in other ways (Rosaldo 1974). An evidence of women's influence through other than legitimate authority follows:

Cheyenne women ruled the camps, spurred men on to necessary duties, and checked them when unwise actions were contemplated. Although women did not take part in tribal councils, their influence was immediate upon their husbands. Arguing, cajoling, persuading, the Cheyenne women carried their points about tribal concerns" (Berthrong, op.cit.:37).

Another account of the possible influence of women in directing men is seen in this custom of making a decision to go to war for revenge.

"If injured by people of another tribe they were eager for revenge. If people belonging to the village had been killed in some recent fight, the women in the camp went about and begged the young men to go to war, to take vengeance on their enemies. They passed their hands over the men, imploring them to take pity on them, while through the village old men shouted advice to all men to go to war, and kill some of the enemy. That the lamentations of the mourners might cease. The killing of enemies brought comfort and consolation to those whose relations had been killed by those of that tribe - it wiped away their tears" (Grinnell, op.cit.:6)

The Cheyenne allowed no legitimate authority to women, but their influence and power is directed through men. Cheyenne law distinguishes between men and women in terms of div-

orce and suicide and abortion is considered homicide by the woman, and she bears the full consequences of this crime. Women are not allowed in formal participation in the political life in most matters, but influenced decisions through their influence on their husbands.

RELIGION

Women's roles in the religious ceremonies and activities of the Cheyenne were minimal relative to men's roles. Three major ceremonies are central to the Cheyenne religious experience: The Arrow Renewal, the Sun Dance, and the Massaum (Contrary). The Arrow Renewal and the Sun Dance are both patterned after teaching of culture heroes who visited the Sacred Mountain and then taught the Cheyenne the ceremonies. The Arrow Renewal is related to the culture hero, Sweet Medicine. The Sacred Arrows and the rite of their renewal are central in the beliefs of the Cheyenne. One of the aspects noted by Hoebel about the Arrow Renewal is in effect a reaffirmation of the domination of males over females: "It stamps the domination of males over females in ultimate determination of tribal matters, since men alone may actively participate in the rite" (Hoebel, op.cit.:11).

"On the fourth and final day, the arrows are exposed to the sun, and to public view...Now while all the women are securely hidden in their tipis, every Cheyenne male, from the smallest babe in arms to the oldest dodderer, passes before the Arrows to receive their beneficent effect. The Arrow renewal lasts four days, during which time, the women are confined. On the dawn of the fifth day, the ceremony is over. After four days of confine-

ment, the women may throw back the door coverings of their tipis and emerge into the open. Life is renewed, purified, and strengthened because it has been resanctified" (ibid.:10).

The Sun Dance requires eight days to complete; the Massaum, four days and four nights. In both of these the wife of the pledger of the ceremony takes part in consecrated sex relations with the pledger as part of the renewal of the life of the tribe. Hoebel states that women play a much more important role in the Massaum. The only mention of women participants is the "Sexual dedication of the pledger's wife" and "a symbolic antelope or buffalo corral" that the women build on the fourth day (ibid.:17).

All other mention of women and the religious functions of the tribe show women in secondary roles. Most of these women were the wives of the main practitioner of the event.

Religion and the supernatural are often related to the cause and cure of disease - this is true of the Cheyenne beliefs. The role and power attributed to women in dealing with sickness is interesting in exploring their position in the Cheyenne culture.

"Since disease is believed to arise from supernatural as well as from natural causes, the work of healing is a mingling of natural and supernatural remedies. Many people - men and women alike - have the power to heal sickness. (Grinnell, op.cit.:127).

The powers of the doctors and the horsedoctors were both said to be known and used by women; but all accounts reveal these women to be the wives of a man who had received this

knowledge and chose a woman to assist him. Thus it seems that a woman was not chosen nor could she choose to develop these powers and receive this knowledge independently, but rather by virtue of her relationship to a man in this position. Healing by herbs was practiced by both men and women, and Grinnell verifies this. "Almost every old woman had a bundle of medicines peculiarly her own, the secrets of which were known only to her. These were usually carried about in a little buffalo-skin sack" (Grinnell, op.cit.:134).

When there was a death, the mourning customs fell most heavily on the women.

"Female relatives, especially mothers and wives, cut off their long hair and gash their foreheads so that the blood flows. If the dead one has been killed by enemies, they slash their legs so that they become caked with dried blood; sometimes the blood is not washed off for many weeks. Widows who wish to make an extravagant display of their bereavement gash themselves fearfully and move off alone to live destitute in the brush. The isolation may last a full year, until relatives begin gradually to camp around her, slowly reincorporating her into kin and community life. In these instances, the death of a husband means the almost total severance of social bonds for the survivor" (Hoebel, op.cit.:88).

When a man died, all his property not placed with him - and often that of his father and even of his brothers - was given away, to people who were not his relatives. The widow, and her children, if any, retained nothing but perhaps blankets to cover themselves (Grinnell, op.cit.:163).

"The death of my husband marked the passing of our tipi, including all the contents. If people do not come and carry away something, the whole tipi is destroyed by fire" (Michelson, op.cit.:7).

The widow and children, often separated, lived with relatives for a year or two.

"In the course of this time, however, some one of her relatives was very likely to have given a lodge to the widow, and she camped near a brother, who supplied her with meat; and after a time she began to get her children back, one by one, until at last all were living with her again. If she had growing boys, they learned to hunt, and assisted in supporting her and the sisters. Such a family always got along somehow. Often widows married again. A widow decided for herself whether she would marry, or whom she would marry. When a man asked a widow to marry him, she might after stipulating for the support and good treatment of her children - tell him to give a horse to her father, or to one of her brothers, and she would marry him" (Grinnell, op.cit.:162-163).

Sacrifices, involving offerings of the body were often made, some accompanied by a certain ritual, others without ceremony. Women often made these in the situation of praying for the recovery of a relative from sickness:

"Women quite often cut off joints of their fingers in sacrifice for the recovery of a sick husband or child, and with no ceremony beyond the usual prayer of a priest. Medicine Woman, formerly the wife of Wolf Chief, when one of her children was sick, promised to sacrifice to the sun the terminal joint of the little finger of her right hand, if the child should get well. It recovered, and at the proper time, Medicine Woman went to a priest, who raised her right hand to the sun, made a prayer, and then, with a sharp knife, cut off the joint" (ibid. 96).

While there were no initiation or puberty rites for boys in Cheyenne culture, other than going on their first warpath, there is a clear cut transition rite for the Cheyenne girl. This occurs at the time of her first menstruation, and establishes a pattern she will follow after that in accordance with beliefs about the negative supernatural powers of menstrual blood:

The first menstruation of a girl is a great event. She has entered womanhood, and her father calls the news to the entire camp from beside his lodge door. If wealthy in horses, he gives one away to signalize the occasion. Like other Indians, the Cheyennes nonetheless consider menstrual blood to be defiling and inimical to the virility of males and to their supernatural powers. The girl, therefore, retires to an isolation, or moon, but so that there will be no danger of her polluting her father's or brother's sacred paraphernalia. Before going, however, she lets down her hair, bathes, and has her body painted all over in red by her older woman relatives. She takes a ceremonial incense purification just before she goes into the hut, where she remains four days with her grandmother, who looks after her and advises her on womanly conduct. At the end of the period, she is again smudged completely to purify her for re-entry into social life. Until menarche, all Cheyenne women leave their tipis for the moon lodge, but only unmarried girls must go through the purification each time" (Hoebel:95-96).

Tabus for women were associated with the touching of feathers of certain birds or dressing the hides of certain animals. Thus:

"Women feared to handle or touch a golden - speckle - tailed - eagle, believing that if they did so patches of pale color would appear on their hands and body. Pipe Woman of Colony, Oklahoma, killed a speckled eagle and is now spotted all over because, as she believes, she handled the eagle...Women believe that if they touch a gray eagle they will turn gray" (Grinnell, op.cit.:125).

It is interesting to note that these eagle feathers possessed great powers for men who wore them (ibid.107-108).

"Of tabus for women some had to do with the dressing of hides. Women might not dress the hides of bear, beaver, wolf, or coyote; such hides were usually dressed by captive women of other tribes; or, in the early days, sometimes by men. Women believed that if they should dress a bear-skin the soles of their feet would crack, and hair would grow over

"their faces. They also feared that they might become "nervous" like a bear. In several other Plains tribes the women fear to dress a bear's hide.

"Since wolves were common and desirable as food, and since their hides were useful, it was worth while that these should be tanned. There was a woman's society whose members after certain ceremonies were freed from the tabu attaching to the skins of wolves and coyotes, and were at liberty to dress the hides. It is believed that any woman who should dress a wolf's hide without going through these ceremonies and so joining this society would become palsied. Many women underwent this ceremony, which was neither difficult nor costly."

There seems to be a general cultural indication that women were believed to have a more intimate bond with the supernatural than men, though many of the connotations of this appear to be negative. The threat of the menstrual blood to the virility and supernatural power of men and the tabus dealing with certain feathers or hides that possess great power for the men seem to indicate this. Women are also noted as seeing their shadows or spirits more often than men. For a man, this is a sign that he will soon die. But for women, "the vision was not certainly followed by death. If an old woman had been badly frightened, she might say, 'I was so badly frightened that I saw my shadow.' The idea seems to be that her life was literally frightened out of her body, and for a moment stood before her. The shadow is a mere shape, seen for an instant, and then gone. It is like a shadow in having no detail; no clothing, no features - a silhouette" (Grinnell 1962:94).

Anciently, women as well as men, were believed to be seers or prophets. These women or men could announce what

was about to happen or could tell what might be occurring at the time at a distance (Grinnell 1960:112). These psychic powers also seem indicative of a bond with the supernatural by women of the Cheyenne culture.

Although Cheyenne women did not participate to a great extent in the major religious ceremonies and rituals of the tribe, they do seem to be identified in some ways with the supernatural order of things. The tabus and restrictions put upon them perhaps gives clues to the importance and potency of women in the religious and supernatural realm.

Women in the Cheyenne culture do not generally hold many roles outside the family unit. Their main role in society is that of wife and mother. There seem, however, to have been many variations within and outside of this role that reflect the individuality of the Cheyenne women, as well as indicating their independence from the norm.

The Cheyenne tribe was very war-oriented, and though this was the activity of men it seems that some women took part, too.

"While it was not common for women to go on the warpath with men, yet they did so sometimes, and often showed quite as much courage and were quite as efficient as the men whom they accompanied" (Grinnell, op.cit.:44).

Those women who had been to war were set apart from other females of the tribe and may have constituted a society, or class (Grinnell 1962:37). Little is mentioned about these women in accounts of the Cheyenne. Information is elusive and a secret nature is accorded to this society by Grinnell:

"Women who had been to war with their husband formed, it is said by some, a guild or society

and held meetings at which no one else might be present; but, of course, the number of these women was very small" (ibid.:49).

There was also a structured place for women in the men's war activities which was a highly valued one.

"To each soldier band belong four young women, usually girls - though some might be married - of good family. They joined in the dance, and sometimes sat by the singers and sang with them. If the soldiers made a dance, or went from one place to another feasting, the women were with them, but if the camp was moving the girls traveled with their families. Their duties were chiefly social; that is to say, they were present at meetings of the band, took part in the singing and dancing, and sometimes cooked for the soldiers. They were not necessarily related to anyone in the band, but were supposed to be girls of the best families in the camp. If one of them resigned, or for any reason fell out, another was selected to fill her place by the soldier chiefs. When a girl had been chosen, two young men were sent to her lodge to bring her. The position was an honorable one.

"Such a girl was spoken of as nut uhk e a, female soldier. Usually a good-looking girl was chosen who devoted herself to the position in much the same spirit a nun gives herself to her vocation. The girl was not compelled to retain this position; if she wished to marry, she might resign, and often did so" (Grinnell 1962:50).

Sexual restrictions on women were fairly strict, more so than for the men. Women received a chastity belt from their mother after the first menses, which was worn constantly until marriage. After marriage it was worn whenever the husband was away at war or on the hunt. The woman wears it whenever she goes away from her lodge to gather food or water.

"For any man other than her husband to touch it is a private delict of the first magnitude. In one case, a man was nearly stoned to death by the girl and her mother in a surprise ambush. The least that the miscreant may expect is that the girl's female relatives will charge his camp and destroy it" (Hoebel, op.cit.95).

This seems to be an individual personal reaction of the women involved. Women who transgressed the social codes were punished in a moral ritualized way, often their hair was cut and they were exiled from the tribe or publicly disgraced (ibid.:96).

The tribe has only one institutionalized practice where males are allowed to "release all the pent-up, sub-conscious, frustration-bred sexual aggression." This is supposed to take place when a woman is flagrantly adulterous. In four cases noted by Hoebel, the triggering events were desertion, simple adultery, and refusal to enter into a sororate marriage - "all exasperating actions by strong-willed women toward men who claimed a husband's rights." The practice put into effect as a response to these strong-willed women is to "put a woman on the prairie" called noha's wawstan (literally 'any man's wife')."

"The outraged husband invites all the unmarried members of his military society (excepting his wife's relatives) to a feast on the prairie. There the woman is raped by each of them in turn. Big Footed Woman was forced into intercourse with forty or more of her husband's confreres when a young wife. She survived it and lived to be a hundred, but no one else ever married her afterwards. Jassle Woman was nearly dead when she was rescued by Blue Wing and his wife. The right of a husband to give his wife to his soldier 'brothers' is not denied, yet it is a formal right that the Cheyennes in fact cannot accept with equanimity. In two cases, the brothers and father of the woman went forth to attack the whole soldier band, threatening to shoot to kill regardless of the ban on murder. The soldiers scattered and kept out of their way' (ibid.).

Women used their influence to shame the men who took part in a gang rape. "The women in the camps taunt them, and they do not defend themselves, they just hang their heads and walk away" (ibid.)

The Cheyenne woman is "more artistically creative than the male, but within the prescribed limits" (ibid.:90). One of the more highly honored skills of the Cheyenne was the quilling of robes. This activity also provided a strong tie outside the domestic unit through membership in the Quillers Society, an "honored and exclusive group of select women". Entrance into the Quillers Society, as well as many of its activities were guided by ritual.

"A woman or girl not a member of the society has to obtain the help and direction of one member as well as the assistance of the other members. The whole procedure of instruction is highly ritualistic and sacred. The neophyte must provide food and materials. Before the work begins, all the women recite the making of their best pieces - just as a warrior counts coup. An old male crier announces to the whole camp what is being done and publicly invites some poor person to come to see the girl who is going to decorate her first robe. For coming, the visitor receives the gift of a horse, and if he is a man, he rides it around the camp singing a song of praise extolling the giver. Two to four brave warriors are invited to the women's 'coup counting,' and when the women have told their quilling exploits, the men tell their great war deeds and dedicate the kettle of meat, which is offered to the spirits and divided among the women.

"The sewing is done late. If a mistake is made, a warrior who has scalped an enemy must be sent for. He tells his coup and says, 'And when I scalped him, this is how I did it,' so cutting the misplaced quills loose.

"When the Quillers are sewing the lodge decorations, the warriors may 'attack' them in a very formal way. They choose a scout who at some time has been the first to spot the enemy and he goes to the Quillers' lodge to see what they have to eat. He is followed by the bravest of all the men, who counts coup on the pot and is privileged to carry away the food without objection from the women" (Hoebel, op.cit.:64)

The Cheyenne women do have an identity that comes from associations outside the domestic arrangement. They take part in activities outside this unit as well as belonging to

societies of exclusively women. The Cheyenne woman is more closely circumscribed in her permissible sexual activities than a man, but here as in other areas, her independence shows itself. Though formally the Cheyenne woman seems limited in her social expressions and roles, her independent nature and influence provides many alternatives for behavior (Rosaldo 1974).

"Cheyenne women, although their status is inferior to men in many respects, are strong-willed and aggressive; they are by no means downtrodden" (Hoebel 1960:2). Though the Cheyenne society in all legal aspects is a male dominated one, the Cheyenne women informally hold a more nearly egalitarian status than might be expected. Cheyenne uxori-local residence is very important in contributing to the strength of the Cheyenne women. Though this residence has not resulted in the formation of matrilineages or matrilineal clans (ibid.:22), it clearly lends support and enhances the power of women. Though women contribute to the economy and survival of the tribe and their efforts are often culturally acknowledged, the men's activities are generally given more prestige and the men have a greater access to economic assets. Though Cheyenne women had no legal authority, their effect on Cheyenne law and political dealings was felt through their influence over their husbands and indirect or non-legal power. Cheyenne religious ceremonies and beliefs centered mostly on and around men, but women were also associated with the supernatural. Formally, the Cheyenne woman seems restricted to the domestic sphere in her social and cultural expressions of self, but actually, she had more alter-

natives and often took advantage of the individualistic and flexible nature of the Cheyenne culture and her strength as a Cheyenne woman.

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