

## 1. Description

**1.1 Name of society, language, and language family:** Pitjantjatjara, Pitjantjanjara, Pama-Nyungan (ethnologue.com)

**1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com):** pjt (ethnologue.com)

**1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):** They now occupy the region ... Musgrave Ranges, South Australia (1)

**1.4 Brief history:** By the 1960's, many Pitjantjatjara women and men of Central Australia lived in Adelaide, Alice Springs, and other towns and on stations. They were clerks, teachers, mechanics, shearers, cattlemen, domestics and fruit-pickers, whose lives appeared identical with those of non-Aborigines (overlooking the pernicious effects of prejudice and discrimination). Only the home language distinguished them. Many other Pitjantjatjara lived on mission and government stations. Their subsistence base was store-bought food. The bushman craft of these latter compared poorly with that of the masterly G/wi... Then came the Outstation Movement. Many Pitjantjatjara moved away from stations, came back from the city and towns, and managed to live off the bush. It took them some time. They didn't abandon store-bought food at once but, quite soon, the women's and men's bushcraft, knowledge of, and skills in gathering and hunting were refurbished to the standard needed for comfortable, secure living (2).

**1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:** Th

**1.6 Ecology:** The Pitjantjatjara live in a very arid environment of sandy, montane and shield desert, tussock grassland and scrub with very low and variable rainfall. Their country lies in the eastern Western Desert, where the borders of South Australia, Western Australia, and the Northern Territory meet. The very low population density ranged around 1 person per 80 to 200 km<sup>2</sup> according to estimates. People have access to the resources of the southern fringe of the "Aboriginal grain belt" in which grass seed, other seeds and fruit, as well as small game is available, especially reptiles and small mammals; larger mammals and birds are rare. Portable, multi-functional implements characterize technology, and seed-grinding implements were a feature (1).

**1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density**

## 2. Economy

**2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):**

**2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:**

**2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:** Tools were multi-functional since people were very mobile., largely due to a scarcity of water, hence portability was a major consideration. As a result, Western Desert people had relatively few types of tools and weapons, and they were multifunctional. The spear thrower incorporated a scoop or dish, a hafted adze (tool used for smoothing or cutting), and a fire-saw (tool for creating fire). They had sharpened fighting sticks (2). The non-returning boomerang and shield were apparently not used in the Pitjantjanjara area (1)

**2.4 Food storage:** Foods were stored "in the field" in the form of desiccated bush tomatoes on left on the vine or dried on skewers. Fruits could be pulverized into storable balls. Meat was stored short-term by thoroughly cooking, wrapping in leaves, and placing in a tree. This source says that the Western Desert people possessed the technology to prepare and store many of their plant staples (1).

**2.5 Sexual division of production:** Strong gendered division of labor. Woman make and use their own implements. Men and women perform some of the same activities, such as hunting small reptiles and winnowing *Triodia* grass (1).

**2.6 Land tenure:**

**2.7 Ceramics:** There were relatively few types of containers. In the absence of of suitable basket making, the wooden bowl was the general-purpose container, carried on the head with the aid of a hair or grass ring. These wooden dishes carried foodstuffs and water, they were used for digging and collecting, food preparation, and as bassinets. They also used skin bags as containers (1)

**2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:** A husband had a primary duty to provide food to his wife's parents and not his own. Consumption restrictions reserved certain foods for older men, while these and others were forbidden to children (1).

**2.9 Food taboos:**

**2.10 Canoes/watercraft?** Absence of any but transient bodies of water made watercraft unnecessary (1).

## 3. Anthropometry

**3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):**

**3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):**

## 4. Life History, mating, marriage

**4.1 Age at menarche (f):**

**4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):**

**4.3 Completed family size (m and f):**

**4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):**

**4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):**

**4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:**

**4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:** and polygyny was generally low, with a few men marrying more than two wives (1).

**4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:** Evidence of bride service (1)

**4.9 Inheritance patterns:**

**4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:**

**4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:**

**4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):**

**4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these "other fathers" recognized?**

**4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., "receptacle in which fetus grows")**

- 4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?
- 4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape
- 4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin)
- 4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?
- 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring
- 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?
- 4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females
- 4.22 Evidence for couvades
- 4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)
- 4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?
- 4.24 Joking relationships?
- 4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations
- 4.26 Incest avoidance rules
- 4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?
- 4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?
- 4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)
- 4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?
- 4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who: The bestowal of infant girls had links to circumcision initiation, as a boy's circumciser became his future wife's father. Some exchange by men of sisters and daughters is reported. A kin network with the form of a "shifting web" resulted from distant cross-cousin marriages, but with some sister and daughter exchange linking kin groups (1).

#### Warfare/homicide

- 4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:
- 4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:
- 4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:
- 4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations): Pitjantjanjara and their neighbors formed a part of an extensive and continuous web of relations across the Western Desert. People to the margins of the region accommodated to the institutions of their neighbors further out, leading to some differentiation among Western Desert peoples. Institutions were undergoing a process of change at the threshold of colonization, for example, in the diffusion of section systems into the region (1).
- 4.18 Cannibalism?

#### 5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

- 5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size: Residential groups: 14 people on average with larger aggregations of up to 300 people (1).
- 5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): Seasonal mobility, smaller groups formed after the summer rains. Depending on winter rains people formed larger groups for ceremonies around larger waters, or split up into smaller, more mobile groups. As temperatures rose, people aggregated on permanent waters, and mobility was minimal (1)
- 5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):
- 5.4 Post marital residence:
- 5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):
- 5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):
- 5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:
- 5.8 Village and house organization: Except for temporary brush hides, no large facilities were used (1).
- 5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):
- 5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere? The Pitjantjanjara slept on the ground and used several windbreak construction methods, like boughs, and bark and grass covering. The floor was often formed into a basin.
- 5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc The Pitjantjanjara and their neighbors identified primarily according to intersecting isoglossic language identifies (e.g. pitja – come/go), loosely related to large tracts of country, proportionate to population density. Other modes of identity included the generational moieties, recently introduced section systems, and personal totem according to place of conception or birth (1).
- 5.12 Trade: Exchange occurred in everyday relations, when resident groups met, and at large ceremonies. Items in wider networks of exchange included weapons, items of appeal, ochres, pearl shells from the northwest, native tobacco from the north, wombat fur from the south, and sacred objects. Specialists exchanged their services for goods, and of course, marriage took the form of an exchange (1).
- 5.13 Indications of social hierarchies? Definitely. Western Desert governance included regional cooperation in rituals, especially male initiation, that instantiated ancestral law, and related to ancestral journeys that linked many groups in a network of cross-cutting links. Relations of authority had a marked generational structure, as a senior generation not only had authority over younger generations, but "looked after them" as well. The ethnography of the region stresses the achievement of personal autonomy by moving through the generational structure of authority, and the separation of genders. Women enjoyed a considerable degree of autonomy, expressed in secret women's rituals (1).

## 6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

### 6 Time allocation to RCR:

**6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):** Ngangkari, a traditional healer (3)

**6.2 Stimulants:** Tobacco (1)

**6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):** Initiation rites in this region included a number of ordeals for male initiates including circumcision and subincision (the underside of the penis is incised and the urethra is slit open lengthwise, from urethral opening towards to base) (1)

**6.4 Other rituals:** The institution of *kudaitji* included secret killings in retaliation for breaches of religious secrecy, as well as for untoward events (1)

**6.5 Myths (Creation):**

**6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):** Plant fibers were not used, but rather hair and fur for public coverings and carrying rings, and sinews for binding (1).

**6.7 Sex differences in RCR:**

**6.8 Missionary effect:**

**6.9 RCR revival:**

**6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:**

**6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?**

**6.12 Is there teknonymy?**

**6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.)** The ancestral cosmology emphasized long ancestral journeys connecting one place with many others. Many ancestors were associated with increase sites and rites, and other rituals such as male initiation and erotic rituals. As well as sorcery and magic performed by ngankari sorcerer/healers. People across the region cooperated in a system of local increase rites, performed regularly to ensure the reproduction of food species and the onset of rains (1)

## 7. Adornment

**7.1 Body paint:**

**7.2 Piercings:**

**7.3 Haircut:**

**7.4 Scarification:** male circumcision and subincision (1)

**7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):** Penis ornaments, women's pubic coverings (1)

**7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:**

**7.7 Sex differences in adornment:**

**7.8 Missionary effect:**

**7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:**

## 8. Kinship systems

**8.1 Sibling classification system:** "Aluridja" kin terminology, in which distant cross-cousins were distinguished from siblings. The bestowal of infant girls had links to circumcision initiation, as a boy's circumciser became his future wife's father. Some exchange by men of sisters and daughters is reported and polygyny was generally low, with a few men marrying more than two wives. A kin network with the form of a "shifting web" resulted from distant cross-cousin marriages, but with some sister and daughter exchange linking kin groups (1).

**8.2 Sororate, levirate:**

**8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):**

## 9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

### Numbered references

1. Keen, Ian. **Aboriginal Economy and Society: Australia at the Threshold of Colonization.** [http://arts.anu.edu.au/aesatc/supplementary\\_materials.html](http://arts.anu.edu.au/aesatc/supplementary_materials.html)
2. Silberbauer, George. **Neither are your ways my ways. Cultural diversity and the twentieth-century foragers: an African perspective.** Cambridge University Press, 1996 p 21-64