

## 1. Description

**1.1 Name of society, language, and language family:** Pitjantjatjara. Languages are Pintiini, Yankunytjatjara, and English for those in the Ernabella Mission and other Missions. Dialects are Yankunytjatjara, Pitjantjatjara (Pithantjatjarra). (2)

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

**1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):** Central Australia. . Since the early 1930's, the Pitjantjatjara have been split up into several groups, whose new homes range from Areyonga in the Northern Territory to Yalata and Port Augusta in South Australia: this is a span of over a thousand miles. (1) Northern Territory: southwest corner; South Australia state: Pitjantjatjara freehold lands, Yalata; Western Australia state. (2)

**1.4 Brief history:** Have been called one of the toughest and most courageous of the desert tribes of Central Australia. Prior to the coming of the white man, the Pitjantjatjara people were completely, and without embarrassment, naked. The Pitjantjatjara people were masters in the art of hunting and gathering, considering the very scarce resources at their disposal in their location. For countless centuries the Pitjantjatjara people knew little of an outside world which could have brought about changes into their lives. They continued to live as their fathers had done, learning from the accumulated knowledge of generations, while other tribes were disappearing off the face of the earth. Personal ambition played no part in their lives, and in all things they lived as a community in the true sense of the word; not as a collection of individualists. (1)

**1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:** Essentially westernized the Aborigines that were involved with the missionaries. From conforming to European haircuts to adopting the western culture entirely. Examples would be working construction and building for the white man, abandoning traditional Pitjantjatjara marriage, and becoming dependent on missionaries for survival. (1)

**1.6 Ecology:** Boulder-strewn ranges, occasional grassed valleys, vast red sand dunes, desert oaks and only a few assured water supplies. The Pitjantjatjara people had few safe waters to fall back upon during their frequent grim drought years. (1)

**1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density:** 3,660 (2)

## 2. Economy

**2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):** Grass seeds and edible plants. Of the edible fruits, quandongs, wild figs and mistletoe berries are all very popular in their seasons, as well as the wild tomato of which there are several varieties. (1)

**2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:** Snakes and lizards constituted the main reliable supplies of food as well as grass seeds and plants. In addition, kangaroos, euros, rat kangaroos, emus, printis (or perenties) and wild turkeys, were eagerly hunted by the men. But these larger animals and birds were never very plentiful; and to spear them required considerable skill and cunning on the part of the hunters. (1)

**2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:** Spears and woomera. Absence of the boomerang. Sharpened fighting sticks. The men make their spears, using the twisty stems from a local tecoma which they straighten over heat, working on them until they have fine smooth shafts, nine or ten feet long. The heads, or as the people call them, the bases, are made from mulga, shaped and attached to the shafts with the gum collected from spinifex and firmly bound with kangaroo sinew, softened by chewing. (1)

**2.4 Food storage:** Variety of wooden dishes, deep or shallow; large and small. They carried food or water in these vessels, used them as shovels for digging and for cleaning seeds gathered for grinding and cooking. (1)

**2.5 Sexual division of production:** Men hunted while women gathered food and cared for babies. In mission environments, specifically Ernabella, children tended to school, women spun sheep wool making rugs and mats, and weaving cloths and tapestries; the men tended sheep, gardened, and built houses under white supervision (1).

2.6 Land tenure:

**2.7 Ceramics:** Quartz found on the end of woomeras was used to start fires or as a knife to disembowel game.

**2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:** Only within the community. The community provided for and maintained itself and they received no help from the outside. (1)

2.9 Food taboos:

**2.10 Canoes/watercraft?** No canoes or watercraft since there was no body of water where they would be needed.

## 3. Anthropometry

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

**3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):** Slight to average build

## 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):** Considering the husband and wife, a couple would not usually have more than five children on average. (1)

**4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):** If the birth of a new baby occurred shortly after the death of an older child, the new little one was killed. If a baby was born too close to an older child, the new baby was killed. Infanticide was common. (1)

**4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):** Early marriage is not acceptable in Pitjantjatjara society. A man is not considered to be of marriageable age until he has passed through several degrees of initiation which would make him at least twenty-five. Girls marry younger, but some are over twenty, or even thirty before marriage, though all marry eventually. (1)

- 4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:** It isn't forbidden but is not common. If a married man is found to be having an extra-marital affair, he is liable to be speared through the thigh, and his wife quickly brings him to heel by the simple expedient of going away and leaving him. The erring husband is seldom slow in following after his wife and seeking reconciliation. (1)
- 4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:** Usually not more than two wives for any one man. Monogamy is quite normal. When a man takes a second wife it is always bitterly resented by the first wife. Fights between the new and old wife are almost inevitable. There is no practice of lending wives. (1)
- 4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:** No
- 4.9 Inheritance patterns:
- 4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:** If an offspring's birth followed too closely to that of an older child, that is, within two or even three years, the mother would have very little chance of rearing both children, rather, a strong risk of losing them. By smothering the new baby at birth before she had developed any affection for it, the mother's milk supply was renewed for the older child who was not weaned until he was about four or five years of age. Infants born to unmarried mothers, the result of illicit liaisons, or of attempted marriages which have proved to be unacceptable, for any of a number of reasons, to the tribe as a whole, were killed at birth. (1)
- 4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:** Nonexistent
- 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?** To the Pitjantjatjara child, his parents are his *mama* (father) and *nguntju* (mother); but his father's brothers are also known as *mama(s)*, and his mother's sisters *nguntju(s)*. To differentiate between the actual parents and uncles or aunts it may be necessary to inquire *whether* a certain relative is the child's "big" *nguntju*, "true" *nguntju*, or "later" *nguntju*. The mother's brothers are uncles, and the father's sisters, aunts. (1)
- 4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., "receptacle in which fetus grows")** Yes, although it was possible for a child to have multiple fathers. (1)
- 4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?** No
- 4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape:** No
- 4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin)
- 4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?** Sex was looked down upon if not married. Children born to unmarried mother were killed at birth. (1)
- 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring
- 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?** When a parent dies it is customary for another "mother" or "father" to accept the full responsibility for the orphaned children. To determine whether the children are all offspring of the same parents it can require questioning along biological lines to discover that while all the children may have come from the same womb, they have had different fathers, due to a widowed mother having remarried. (1)
- 4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females:** Usually not more than two wives for any one man. (1)
- 4.22 Evidence for couvades:** No
- 4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)** An older child by age might not necessarily be the eldest child in the eyes of the society depending on the age of the father and may not necessarily be older than a *malanypa* (younger brother or sister), because they may be either the children of the child's "big" mother, or "big" father, the older brother or sister of a parent, through whom they take precedence. (1)
- 4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?
- 4.24 Joking relationships?** By temperament, the Pitjantjatjaras are friendly, witty and quick to see a joke, but equally quick to take offense and flare up. (1)
- 4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations
- 4.26 Incest avoidance rules:** Cousins are known and regarded as brothers or sisters with whom marriage would be unthinkable. (1)
- 4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?** The actual marriage, or calling, of a girl is when the bridegroom takes her by the arm in the presence of witnesses. He may announce his intentions by making a present of food to the bride's parents. If the union is likely to arouse tribal opposition, elopement offers the only solution. Good timing, skill and ingenuity are necessary to bring off a successful elopement. (1)
- 4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?** The main direct cause for change is a death in the tribe. For a number of years, the name of the deceased will never be used, and all people bearing the same or similar names will revert to other names or take new ones. If a person with a "death-name" has no second name to take her or she may be referred to as *Kunmanara* (you whose name must not be mentioned). If a child becomes an orphan, he may be known as *Mintji* (orphan) and not be given another name if the parent died before the child had been given a name. If a girl loses a brother or sister, she may be known as *Pinku*, and in one family there can be two or three girls, all known as *Pinku*, their real names being virtually ignored. (1)
- 4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)** Within the community.
- 4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?** Their early training on relationships ensures that all know exactly who stands in a suitably distant relationship to be considered as a marriage partner. This provides a limited field of choice. (1)
- 4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:** Ideally, the couple should be as unrelated as possible. In a small community, strict marriage rules are necessary. Even with their strict ruling, congenital malformations occur. If there is any irregularity regarding a marriage, it will be broken up by relatives and punishment meted out in the same way as a detected affair. The girl will receive a blow to the head, and the man a spear through the thigh. Irregularities most likely to occur are either due to the man being under age, or a partnership regarded by the tribe as being less than an ideal one from a relationship point of view. (1)

## Warfare/homicide

**4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:** Minimal violence with other tribes.

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):** The Pitjantjatjara people were, together with the Pintubis who lived to their north, by far the most resourceful and accomplished hunters and gatherers in inland Australia. (1)

**4.18 Cannibalism?** Any evidence of cannibalism was usually the result of mental derangement caused by prolonged hunger, a not unknown phenomenon. (1)

## 5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

**5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):** Mobility was the necessary element for living and all that they possessed had to be either easily carried or discarded when on the move. This need to be mobile not only governed their material possessions but also meant the limiting of the size of families and the practice of infanticide. (1)

**5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):** Showing oneself above others was frowned upon. When a man dressed himself, he was believed to be trying "to show himself more than an animal. The form of his body relegates him to the animal kingdom, his clothing raises him above it." Status was mainly between elders and the youth. Not common to have a chief. (1)

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:** Pitjantjatjara people would commonly joke with one another. An exchange of progressively colorful epithets, starting from "Your eyes are narrow!", "Your teeth are sharp!", "Your thighs are thin!", to the unprintable, leads to blows. (1)

5.8 Village and house organization:

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):

**5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?** Slept on the ground.

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:

**5.12 Trade:** They received no help from the outside. They were dependent upon each other and freely acknowledged their dependence, and so through the ages have maintained the welfare of the whole community. (1)

**5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?** Age among tribe members was really the only classification system.

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

6 Time allocation to RCR:

**6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):** Burns were the most common complaint and the burn area would be covered with fat and red ochre. Plants were used in different ways, some barks, or other parts of a plant, being left to soak in water until the water had taken up all the flavor, and then liquid was then drunk as medicine. (1)

6.2 Stimulants:

**6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):** Burial in death followed by not referring to the dead for many years or using their names, however, tribal customs ensure that they will not be forgotten. The verb "being born" (*walkani*), is never used in relation to human birth. The fact of birth is not ignored but they do talk around the subject, making use of euphemisms, so that the baby "arrives" or is "lying". *Walkani* describes the birth of animals. For human birth it would only be used as an obscenity. (1)

**6.4 Other rituals:** Attaching a lock of fair hair over the fontanelle of a new baby. After the customary shaving of the inch-long dark hair, which is a feature of all new-born Aboriginal babies, the fair lock was set in place to encourage the growth of fair hair. (1)

**6.5 Myths (Creation):** There were superstitious fears of an evil spirit fathering a twin in the event of a twin birth. The Pitjantjatjaras believe that a pulsation felt under the arm is the sign that your mother happens to be thinking of you at that moment. Pulsations felt at the other pressure points are attributed to different relatives who may have you in mind. (1)

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

**6.8 Missionary effect:** deliberately stopped ceremonial life, and had interfered with their tribal marriage laws, thereby fatally disrupting the cultures of whole tribes and unwittingly contributing to their eventual extinction. On the positive side, saved the Pitjantjatjara people from becoming completely depopulated. (1)

6.9 RCR revival:

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

**6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?** The names of dead people were not spoken of for many years after death. If a person had the name of a recently deceased tribe member, or even close to it, the person would be forced to change their name. (1)

**6.12 Is there teknonymy?** No

**6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.):** The witch-doctor or medicine man, was involved with curses and the only person who could help under certain circumstances, particularly when magic was involved. (1)

## 7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

7.2 Piercings:

**7.3 Haircut:** Various hairstyles and colors ranging from snowy blond to brown, darkening as they grow older; but black, or near-black hair is rarely seen. Most of the people have some curl in their hair, but straight hair is not uncommon. Very white hair and baldness are also known but not very common, most of the older folk going grey but not white. Their word for baldness reflects a sense of humor which is keen, *katatali*, literally, “sandhill head”. (1)

**7.4 Scarification:** Yes

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

**7.8 Missionary effect:** Not uncommon for Pitjantjatjara people that lived within the Ernabella missionary for an extended period of time to abandon the various traditional Pitjantjatjara hairstyles and conform to a European haircut/style.(1)

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

## **8. Kinship systems**

**8.1 Sibling classification system:** A *kutu* or *kangkuru* can mean older brother or older sister, respectively, but as with other kinship terms, such interpretation limits the meaning. People in those relationships may not necessarily be older than a *malanypa* (younger brother or sister), because they may be either the children of the child’s “big” mother, or “big” father, the older brother or sister of a parent, through whom they take precedence. (1)

**8.2 Sororate, levirate:** No

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

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

- In the same way that a child may have numerous parents, so too, he may have many grandparents, knowing his grandparents and great uncles or aunts as *tjamu* (grandfather) or *kami* (grandmother). Great grandparents are known as either sons or daughters. Admittedly this does sound like “I’m my own grandpa”. (1)
- In appearance, the Pitjantjatjara people are usually of medium height and slight to average build. Their skin is a warm brown, some being markedly lighter than others, though few would be as dark as northern tribesman. (1)
- With longer heels and less calf on their legs than Europeans, these people have more spring in their step. They are built to be walkers. (1)

## **Numbered references**

1. Hilliard, W. M. (1968). *The People In Between: The Pitjantjatjara People of Ernabella*. London: Hodder and Stoughton Limited.
2. Pitjantjatjara. (n.d.). Retrieved February 23, 2017, from <https://www.ethnologue.com/language/pjt>