

1. Description

1.1 Name of society, language, and language family:

Eyak of the Na-Dene, Nuclear Na-Dene, Athapaskan-Eyak, Eyak language family (2).

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

EYA (2).

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

The traditional territory for the Eyak appears to have ranged from the eastern edge of Prince William Sound, to the Martin River and included the Copper River valley as far north as the *Childs* and *Miles* glaciers. The few remaining Eyak who were interviewed in the 1930s resided in Cordova on the Eastern shores of what is now Eyak Lake, approximately 62°10'39"N 143°49'05"W (1, pg. 2).

1.4 Brief history:

Very little is actually known of Eyak culture and history, as it has been determined to be an extinct language with the last full-blooded native dying in 2008. The lack of information may be related to the relative small size of the "tribe" in comparison to neighboring natives, who the Eyak apparently were often confused with. These include the Tlingit and the Chugach Eskimo. The first written records of contact with the Eyak are believed to be from Georg Steller the medical officer that accompanied Vitus Bering on one of his voyages to explore what is now Prince William Sound. As of the present, the Eyak have only been studied once, briefly during the 1930s by Dr. s Kaj Birket-Smith, & Frederica Laguna during an archeological expedition of Prince William Sound (1, pg. 321-350).

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

1.6 Ecology:

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?:

The Eyak used spears, clubs and bow and arrows during times of war. The bow and arrow was the same one used for hunting however a special spear that was longer and had an un-barbed head of bone or stone, than the hunting spear was used. The spears and arrows were smeared with poison made from various plants known only to the shamans. The war club was made of wood and tapered at the end with sharp spikes made from branches that were sharpened and hardened by fire or pieces of bone, protruding from the end. They also carried shields made from large goat skins, dried, and stretched on a wooden rim. It had two handles one for the arm and the other for the hand (1, pg. 145-146).

2.4 Food storage:

Meat and fish were eaten fresh, however when preparing for winter months meat was dried and cut into strips and smoked over a slow fire of green hemlock and or green alder. After about a week of smoking the meat was put into a wooden box with seal oil and placed on top of sleeping rooms. Occasionally sockeye and silver salmon were buried underground on a layer of skunk cabbage leaves and allowed to rot then eaten in the winter (1, pg. 95-96).

2.5 Sexual division of production:

2.6 Land tenure:

2.7 Ceramics:

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

2.9 Food taboos:

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

Traditionally the Eyak employed a dugout canoe that was approximately 16'4" in length at the gunwale and 15'6" at the keel. The beam measured approximately 2'10" and the stern and bow both stood 2'4" high. The stern was curved under but the prow was undercut in a V for a depth of 9", leaving both the gunwale and keel projecting outward. They had a round bottom in the middle and were narrowed at the stern and bow to create a false keel. The larger canoes could carry up to 10 people and slaves did the paddling (1, pg. 45-47).

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:

Percentages for polygyny were not performed when the Eyak were studied however polygyny was practiced and it was not uncommon for a man to have two or three wives. He would not sleep with an older wife once she became barren and instead would take a longer wife; however the older wife was not divorced and remained in the household performing the labor intensive household work (1, pg. 133).

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:

Upon acceptance by the bride's parent the groom began working for her parents. The man was to give a portion of his killed game to the bride's family, however, beyond that the exact services performed are unclear but apparently ended at marriage (1, pg. 132).

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

In terms of hunting and fishing sites, houses and canoes these were communal and did not belong to an individual, however, in terms of personal property the majority of it was destroyed upon death or during the death potlatch. The few items that were saved were traded to members of the opposite moiety. The items exchanged for this property was given to the eldest surviving brother of the deceased (1, pg. 193-194).

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

Among the Eyak Dr.'s Kaj Birket-Smith, & Frederica Laguna informants spoke of men who lived like women, did women's work, and did not hunt. They did not marry other men or have supernatural powers such as those seen in Southern Athapaskan "tribes". Furthermore, they were despised and were forced to live on left over scraps (1, pg. 206).

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

There were/are no rules of village endogamy or exogamy. A couple who married within their own moiety would be completely ostracized; even their closest relatives would refuse to speak to them (1, pg. 131).

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?

If the mother dies then the duty of raising her children falls to her sisters, if she has no sisters then the closest living female relative would assume that responsibility (1, pg. 131).

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?

Traditionally a child was given a name soon after birth by either the mother or maternal grandparents. Generally the child was named after a deceased relative of the same sex from the mother's family. The child was believed to be the deceased relative revived by the sun (1, pg. 152).

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)

There were/are no rules of village endogamy or exogamy. A couple who married within their own moiety would be completely ostracized; even their closest relatives would refuse to speak to them (1, pg. 131).

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?

A man was free to choose his bride subject to her parent's approval; however, the women had no choice. Girls were often engaged before they even went through puberty, often to men older than her father (1, pg. 132).

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

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):

4.18 Cannibalism?

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):

In traditional Eyak society individuals belonged to one of two moieties, at the head of each moiety was a chief, one of which assumed the responsibility for the entire tribe while the other acted purely as the leader of his moiety. It is not sure how entire tribal leadership was acquired or what the chief's true function within society was, however, he tended to be the richest and strongest man in the village. During times of war, the decision to go to war was made during a general meeting, however, the tribal chief lead the war party and commanded the men who went. During hunting parties the chief lead the party, however, he did not assist in carrying the game back to the village nor did he paddle a canoe during trips. When a chief died his brother assumed the role, as his son by rule of exogamy belonged to the other moiety, if the chief did not have a brother then following the logic of matrilineal decent the son of the chiefs closest living female relative would then assume the role. Below the head chiefs was a sub chief for each moiety. (1, pg. 123-130).

5.4 Post marital residence:

Given that the Eyak were exogamous, and that only two moieties existed, the man would become a member of his wives moiety thus making post marital residence matrilineal (1, pg. 123-137).

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships

Between men of the same moiety a form of partnership was common. A man would go to a member of his moiety, not necessary a relative and address him by a special term. They would hunt together, use each other's tools without asking permission, share food, and help each other. They could play like kids with each other's wives but would not engage in sexual intercourse with them (1, pg. 138).

5.8 Village and house organization:

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

Traditionally, individuals slept on bench like structures which during the day served just that purpose, at night however, a mat made of reeds was spread over the bench for comfort, which was then covered with a goat skin mat, the natives themselves used a homemade blanket made of woven goat's hair. Depending on wealth an individual may also have one or two bear skins for added warmth (1, pg. 43).

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

The Eyak were divided into two exogamous, matrilineal moieties, the Eagle, and the Raven groups. It is not known how each moiety obtained the name of its respective bird. There was no taboo against eating either and eagle feathers and skin were frequently used for material items. Nevertheless, members of each moiety considered the other members of that moiety to be brothers and sisters which obviously were perpetuated by their exogamous tendencies (1, pg. 123).

5.12 Trade:

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6 Time allocation to RCR:

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

6.2 Stimulants:

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):

During puberty the girl was secluded in a special hut from 1-12 months depending on the source. There she learned to make baskets and other crafts from older women, her mother, or other female family member. She was not supposed to drink water for a week. There was no special ceremony for the end of the seclusion. During childbirth women were not supposed to eat berries because it was believed they would cause boils. If she ate liver or kidneys the child would be heavy and slow. Fish was further forbidden because they believed the skin of the child would fall off. The actual birth occurred in the sleeping room and the woman was assisted by all the women and female slaves of the household, no mid-wife were used. The new born was washed and paced in a basket and the umbilical cord was cut dried and tied around the child's neck as an amulet (1, pg. 152-162).

6.4 Other rituals:

6.5 Myths (Creation):

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

6.8 Missionary effect:

6.9 RCR revival:

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

When a person died, the body was kept in the house for four days. The body was kept in the main room, leaning against the wall of the sleeping room, the knees drawn up in a customary sitting or squatting position, the arms folded across the breast, or the hands placed on the breast. The limbs were held in place by cords and the jaw was tied shut. The eyes were closed because it was believed that the deceased might look at his next of kin and make them die also. They were dressed in their best clothes and covered in their best blanket. The Eyak did not like to touch the deceased however it was their responsibility to dress and position the corpse. This task fell upon members of the opposite moiety, who generally rushed to help the deceased family as they would receive the greatest number of gifts at the death potlatch. After four days the deceased was cremated or buried in accordance with their or their next of kin's wishes (1, pg. 163).

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.)

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

Both sexes painted their faces, each moiety had their own particular colors and patterns. The designs consisted of a series of lines and or diamonds and were only painted during ceremonial dances or potlatches (1, pg. 60-61).

7.2 Piercings:

Both men and women pierced their ears and their nasal septum. These piercing usually occurred at a very young age and it doesn't appear that any special ceremony accompanied the piercings (1, pg. 63).

7.3 Haircut:

Traditionally men wore their hair parted in the middle and tied to a bunch in the back on either side generally falling to their necks. They greased it with seal oil and during potlatches and mourning's for slain warriors they wore a single Eagle feather in a head band. Shamans wore their hair combed back and fastened behind with a double pronged pin falling to their shoulders. Women and girls wore their hair in one braid down the back, tied at the end with a thong (1, pg. 58-59).

7.4 Scarification:

Both sexes tattooed their wrist with one or more lines around the wrist resembling a bracelet. A hole was made under the skin with an awl and a thread stained with blueberry juice or with charcoal mixed with grease was drawn through until the design was complete. Women also frequently burned their wrist with a glowing stick, to accustom themselves to pain, so that if they were speared during a time of war they would not cry out (1, pg. 61).

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

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:

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

Both sororate and levirate were practiced, if a man's wife died he married her sister unless she was already married in which case he was given his brother's daughter. If a man died his youngest brother or parallel cousin married his widow (1, pg. 133-134).

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. Birket-Smith, Kaj & Laguna, Frederica
The Eyak Indians of the Copper River Delta, Alaska, (Denmark, Levin & Munksgaard, 1938).
2. http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=eya