

## **1. Description**

### **1.1 Name of society, language, and language family:**

-“Omaha-Ponca is the language of the Omaha (UmaNhaN) and Ponca (PpaNkka) nations. Although shared by two distinct nations, it is treated as a single language because mutual comprehension is complete.” [1]

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

### **1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):**

- The Omaha: Nebraska and Oklahoma, United States.
- The Ponca: Nebraska and South Dakota.

### **1.4 Brief history:**

-“The Omaha tribe began as a larger woodland tribe comprising both the Omaha and Quapaw tribes. This tribe coalesced and inhabited the area near the Ohio and Wabash rivers around year 1600.[3] As the tribe migrated west, it split into what became the Omaha and the Quapaw tribes. The Quapaw settled in what is now Arkansas and the Omaha tribe, known as U-Mo'n-Ho'n ("upstream")[4] settled near the Missouri River in what is now northwestern Iowa. Another division happened, with the Ponca becoming an independent tribe, but they tended to settle near the Omaha...It was located on the Big Sioux River near its confluence with the Missouri River, near present-day Sioux City, Iowa. The French then called it "The River of the Mahas." [6]

-“In 1718, the French cartographer Guillaume Delisle mapped the tribe as “The Maha, a wandering nation”, along the northern stretch of the Missouri River. French fur trappers found the Omaha on the eastern side of the Missouri River in the mid-18th century. The Omaha were believed to have ranged from the Cheyenne River in South Dakota to the Platte River in Nebraska. Around 1734 the Omaha established their first village west of the Missouri River on Bow Creek in present-day Cedar County, Nebraska.” [6]

- “Around 1775 the Omaha developed a new village, probably located near Homer, Nebraska.[2] Ton won tonga, also called the "Big Village," was the village of Chief Blackbird. At this time, the Omaha controlled the fur trade on the Upper Missouri River. About 1795, the village had around 1,100 people.[5]” [6]

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

- “It was not until the third decade of the nineteenth century that the Omaha came into direct contact with missionaries and then the contact was occasional rather than constant. In 1845 the first permanent mission was established by the Presbyterian denomination at Bellevue, Nebraska. At the Omaha had been induced by the Government to settle near Bellevue, partly for the sake of protection from their enemies, the Sioux, and partly to bring them under the supervision of the newly established Indian agency. A school was built for the mission on land claimed by the Omaha tribe and several Omaha children were brought under the influence of the teachers...the Omaha had their first opportunity to observe the practical use of the plow and other agricultural implements...Nebraska was soon to become a territory and the new settlers were casting hungry eyes on the Indians' land. In 1853 a United States Commission arrived at Bellevue to take preliminary steps looking to the extinguishment of the Omaha right of occupancy of the broad fertile lands lying on the Missouri north of the Platte river...” [9, pg 626]

### **1.6 Ecology:**

-“...The Omaha was strongly anthropomorphic in its outlook on nature. Everything lived and partook of man's qualities...” [9, pg609]

-“There are still places in Nebraska where one can lie back on the fragrant bed of last-year's bluestem in early April...there is then a true sense of belonging to and being part of the land, and one can only offer an unspoken prayer that such treasures will still be there for the next generation...Nebraska is our spiritual home, our own self-chosen Nirvana, our prairie-born paradise, and the natural surviving legacy of long-forgotten winds, immense amounts of water, no-vanished glacial ice, and unfathomable eons of time...” [12, pg191]

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

-“The first European journal reference to the Omaha tribe was made by Pierre-Charles Le Sueur in 1700. Informed by reports, he described an Omaha village with 400 dwellings and a population of about 4,000 people.” [6]

## **2. Economy**

-Mainly hunting and trade [2]

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

- “In the fall, the Omahas returned to their villages to harvest corn,...and squash.” [2]
- “Ponca women worked together to harvest crops of corn, beans, squash, and pumpkins.” [5]

### **2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:**

- “During the spring and summer, the Omaha tribe followed the buffalo herds, and their diet consisted mostly of meat.” [2]
- Omahas and Poncas “hunted small game, and fished in the rivers.” [2]
- They also hunted Deer. [5]
- “ In the fall, the Omahas returned to their villages to harvest...beans” [2]

### **2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:**

- “Omaha (and Ponca) hunters used bows and arrows. Fishermen used spears or special fishing arrows. In war, Omaha (and Ponca) men fired their bows or fought with war clubs and hide shields.” [2]

### **2.4 Food storage:**

- “In the winter, they ate dried food.” [2]

### **2.5 Sexual division of production:**

- “Omaha (and Ponca) men were hunters and sometimes went to war to protect their families. Omaha (and Ponca) women were farmers and also built and transported teepees. Only men became Omaha (and Ponca) chiefs, but both genders took part in storytelling, artwork and music, and traditional medicine.” [2, 5]
- “Ponca women worked together to harvest crops of corn, beans, squash, and pumpkins.” [5]
- Women also cleaned all of the hides, made the clothes and moccasins [9].
- Ponca “Men hunted deer and small game, fished in the rivers and lakes, and took part in seasonal buffalo hunts.” [5]
- “ Before the 1850s the Omaha divided much of their labor along gender and age lines. Females were responsible for all child and home care, including collecting firewood, hauling potable water, moving and maintaining tepees, and building and maintaining earth lodges. They developed and maintained gardens and gathered plant materials for home use. They shared these duties with their female kin and offspring. The result was that the tipi, the earth lodge, and the products of the garden were the property of women” [8]
- “Participation in the fur trade placed extra burdens on females to prepare furs and hides for the market.” [8]
- “ The husband and other male kin would assist in some of the heavier duties related to earth lodge construction and gardening.” [8]

### **2.6 Land tenure:**

- “Garden plots and earth lodge sites were generally the property of the wife and her sisters and daughters. The tribe collectively laid claim to the lands upon which its members routinely hunted. Communally held reservation lands were allotted to individuals beginning in 1871 and continuing through the early 1900s.” [8]

### **2.7 Ceramics:**

- Omahas make clay pots for water and cooking. [3]
- “Omaha artists are famous for their quilling, beadwork, and hide paintings.” [2]

### **2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:**

- “After the noon hour food was cooked and served to the chiefs, while the herald called the families of these men to receive their share. Much of the food was consumed and distributed on this occasion...when the tattooing was finished...In apportioning the fees the person who did the tattooing received the largest share, and all the food, both cooked and uncooked, that remained became his property.” [9, pg 506-507]
- “...Two meals were taken, one in the morning, the other at night. When food was cooked it was removed from the fire and the kettles were set near the mother’s place in the tent. The family took their places in a circle around the fire. Of there were neighbors or informal guests, they sat with the family. The mother apportioned the food into bowls, which she set on a skin spread in front of those who were to eat. In the duty of passing food she might be assisted by her elder daughter or some near kinswoman or an intimate friend.” [9, pg 335]

### **2.9 Food taboos:**

- “Young males would maintain a solitary fast for four days on a hilltop while praying to Wakó<sup>n</sup>da for help throughout life.” [8]
- “...Boys of the Wazhinga itazhi subgens of the Tha’tada gens...could not touch the birds or join in the feast, as small birds were tabu to them” [9, pg 365]

### **2.10 Canoes/watercraft?**

-“No--the Omaha Indians didn't live near the ocean. When they traveled over land, the Omahas used dogs pulling travois (a kind of drag sled) to help them carry their belongings.” [2]

-“No--the Ponca Indians weren't coastal people, and when they traveled by river, they usually built bowl-shaped rafts out of willow rods and buffalo hide. Over land, the Poncas used dogs pulling travois.” [5]

### **3. Anthropometry**

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f): None Found. My guess would be between 5-6ft.

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f): None Found. My guess would be between 5-6ft.

### **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):**

-“...no girl was considered marriageable until she knew how to dress skins, fashion and sew garments, embroider, and cook. Nor was a young man a desirable husband until he had proved his skill as a hunter and shown himself alert and courageous.” [9, pg330]

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

-“Divorce was not uncommon.” [8]

-“An abusive husband could be turned out, the children would remain with the mother, and the father's male kin were expected to continue to support the family. An immoral wife could be turned out and punished by her husband. Generally, 'the Omaha did not favor changing the marriage relationship on a whim. In the late twentieth century serial monogamy was the general practice. Long-term stable marriages are the honored ideal.’” [8]

-“Cohabitation constituted marriage whether the relation was of long or short duration.” [9, pg 325]

#### **4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:**

-“Polygamy existed into the early twentieth century, although it was not the rule. A man rarely had more than two wives, and they were generally sisters or aunt and niece. The practice was more common among prominent men who had political and ritual duties requiring extra labor and resources. Divorce was not uncommon.” [8]

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

-“...The father of the young man made a feast and invited the relatives of the girl. When the invitation was accepted and the presents received, the marriage was considered as settled and beyond all dispute. In the course of a few months the father of the bride generally presented his daughter with return gifts about equal in value to those he had received. The young husband was expected to work for a year or two for his father-in-law. This latter claim was frequently rigidly exacted and the father-in-law was sometimes a tyrant over his son-in-law's affairs” [9, pg324]

#### **4.9 Inheritance patterns:**

- “Inheritance of clan name, clan rights, land, and other tangible objects usually follows a patrilineal pattern. However, ritual knowledge and rights may pass from the wife's kin to her husband or children, depending on the receiver's having shown a marked interest in such knowledge. Most of a person's personal property is distributed to kin and nonkin mourners at the funeral. Without estate planning, most land passes into undivided ownership among increasing numbers of patrilineal and/or matrilineal heirs, sometimes including adopted kin and stepchildren.” [8]

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

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

-“The following story is told of a man who was highly respected, industrious, and thrifty. He never married; why no one knew, for he was an attractive man. He had a brother who for some reason was always unsuccessful in his wooing and as he greatly desired to marry a certain girl the bachelor brother was moved to say: “I will help you to get the girl you want.” To the surprise of everyone, the girl included, the bachelor was seen at the spring, where he wooed the girl and planned their elopement. At the appointed hour he signaled her, she came to him, and together they rode to the lodge of one of his near relatives where the brother was waiting. The bachelor explained to the girl that he had been wooing her for his brother, and the girl, having compromised herself by running away with her supposed lover, concluded to accept the transfer; the marriage so strangely entered on turned out pleasantly for both parties.” [9, pg324-325]

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

- "...structures are, in effect, ideologically complex, because they rely upon negative marriage rules, but empirically elementary, because they narrow the range of choice of spouses to specified descent groups..." [10, pg806]

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)**

- "...structures are, in effect, ideologically complex, because they rely upon negative marriage rules, but empirically elementary, because they narrow the range of choice of spouses to specified descent groups..." [10, pg806]

- "When a marriage was arranged by a girl's parents, with or without her consent, it was apt to be with a man in mature like and established position. The would-be husband made large presents to the girl's parents and relatives... Young men derided this kind of marriage saying, "An old man cannot win a girl; he can win only her parents"" [9, pg325]

#### **4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?**

- "Men and women were socially on moral equality. Tribal custom favored chastity and those who practiced it stood higher in public esteem than those who did not. In the case of a woman who in her youth committed indiscretions and later led a moral life, while her former acts were remembered, they were not held against her or her husband or children. Both men and women were allowed to win back by subsequent good conduct their lost position." [9, pg323-324]

- "Cohabitation constituted marriage whether the relation was of long or short duration, always provided that the woman was not the wife of another man, in which case the relation was a social and punishable offense. Prostitution, as practiced in a white community, did not exist in the tribe." [9, pg325]

#### **4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring**

- NO- "The husband or close relatives often administer punishment to a man who has committed adultery. A wife may assault a woman who shows undue attention to her husband." [8]

#### **4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?**

- "In the event of the death of the mother and father, provided the father had no brothers, the uncle (mother's brother) had full control of the children and no relative of the father dispute the right of the uncle to the children." [9, pg325]

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?**

- "It was obligatory that a man and wife should belong to different gentes and not be close blood relation through their mothers." [9, pg325]

#### **4.24 Joking relationships?**

- "Teasing as a socialization tool is widespread and is applied to both children and adults." [8]

#### **4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations**

"Inheritance of clan name, clan rights, land, and other tangible objects usually follows a patrilineal pattern. However, ritual knowledge and rights may pass from the wife's kin to her husband or children, depending on the receiver's having shown a marked interest in such knowledge. Most of a person's personal property is distributed to kin and nonkin mourners at the funeral. Without estate planning, most land passes into undivided ownership among increasing numbers of patrilineal and/or matrilineal heirs, sometimes including adopted kin and stepchildren." [8]

#### **4.26 Incest avoidance rules**

- "It was obligatory that a man and wife should belong to different gentes and not be close blood relation through their mothers." [9, pg325]

#### **4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?**

- "When a young man asked the hand of a girl in marriage he observed a certain conventional form of address. The words were not always the same but the aspect on the proposal was practically uniform...he did not vaunt himself; he pleaded his constancy and asked rather than demanded, that she become his wife, craving it as a boon." [9, pg324]

-“...The father of the young man made a feast and invited the relatives of the girl. When the invitation was accepted and the presents received, the marriage was considered as settled and beyond all dispute. In the course of a few months the father of the bride generally presented his daughter with return gifts about equal in value to those he had received. The young husband was expected to work for a year or two for his father-in-law. This latter claim was frequently rigidly exacted and the father-in-law was sometimes a tyrant over his son-in-law’s affairs.” [9, pg324]

-“...should formal consent be denied by either parent, while this act interrupted the festivity, it did not invalidate the marriage or have any effect on the issue of such marriage; it merely made the lives of the young couple difficult and uncomfortable. There was no tribal usage or tradition which made it possible to deprive a child of its rights to or through its father; according to tribal custom all a man’s children had equal claim on him and he was responsible for all his progeny.” [9, pg325]

**4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?**

-“Inheritance of clan name... usually follows a patrilineal pattern.” [8]

-““As soon as a child could walk steadily it passed through the ceremony called Turning the Child, and, if a boy, through the supplemental ceremony of cutting the lock of hair in consecration of its like to the Thunder and to the protection of the tribe as a warrior. After this experience...the child had now its name, marking its ni’kie rites, and its gentile relationship.” [9,pg 329]

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

-“Individuals married persons from another gens, not within their own. The two moities were each led by head chiefs; between them, they kept up all the responsibilities and balance within the tribe.[12]” [6]

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

-“Potential marriage partners are identified through the use of kin terms that reflect the possibility of future claims.” [8]

**4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:**

-“Marriage was often by elopement so that the girl could escape from the claims of her potential marriage partners. After escaping to the home of one of the boy's relatives, the young couple would return a few days later to the girl's parents' home. The boy's relatives presented gifts to the girl's relatives. If they were accepted, it signaled recognition of the marriage.” [8]

-“Marriage was usually by elopement. The claims on a girl by men holding a potential right to marry her almost necessitated her escaping secretly if she would exercise her free choice in the matter of a husband...the youth generally rode to a place near the lodge of the girl and gave the proper signal; she stepped out and they galloped off to one of his relations...the young husband was expected to work for a year or two for his father-in-law. This latter claim was frequently rigidly exacted and the father-in-law was sometimes a tyrant over his son-in-laws’s affairs.” [9, pg 324]

-“Marriage with a man either on or about to go on the warpath was not permitted; such a union was looked on as a defiance of natural law that would bring disaster on the people for the reason.” [9, pg 325]

**Warfare/homicide**

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

**4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:**

-“Causes for battles with surrounding tribes included raids by encroaching groups, retaliation, and the seeking of war trophies and battlefield prestige. Adversaries included various bands of Dakota and Lakota Sioux, Arikara, Cheyenne, Pawnee, Oto, and the Omaha's nearest kin, the Ponca.” [2,5]

**4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:**

-“The Omahas (and Poncas) also fought wars with other tribes. Plains Indian tribes treated war differently than European countries did. They didn't fight over territory but instead to prove their courage, and so Plains Indian war parties rarely fought to the death or destroyed each other's villages. Instead, their war customs included counting coup (touching an opponent in battle without harming him), stealing an enemy's weapon or horse, or forcing the other tribe's warriors to retreat. Some tribes the Omahas frequently fought with included the Sioux and Kanza.” [2, 5]

-“Some tribes the Poncas frequently fought with included the Pawnees and Dakotas.” [5]

**4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):**

-“Although the Omaha have maintained a legacy of "peace" with the federal government, armed conflicts with others were not uncommon before the 1900s. To maintain control of the fur and gun trade of the middle [Missouri](#), the Omaha battled on one occasion with the Spanish. Causes for battles with surrounding tribes included raids by encroaching groups, retaliation, and the seeking of war trophies and battlefield prestige. Adversaries included various bands of Dakota and Lakota Sioux, Arikara, Cheyenne, Pawnee,

Oto, and the Omaha's nearest kin, the Ponca. Alliances and peace were established and breached through time. The performance of the *Wawa*<sup>n</sup> (Calumet ceremony) was one method of establishing peace. Peace with the Arikara probably facilitated the transferal of local strains of maize and earth lodge technology to the Omaha. Peace with the Pawnee permitted joint use of the prime buffalo hunting grounds of the central Great Plains. Struggles with outside groups in the twentieth century included fiercely fought legal battles to retain or reclaim sovereign Omaha rights and resources. The unarmed occupation of the Blackbird Bend area of Iowa, followed by lengthy court battles, resulted in the return of lands reserved under the 1854 treaty. Occasional legal actions against the neighboring Winnebago seem to reflect competition for limited resources rather than fundamental animosity.” [8]

#### **4.18 Cannibalism?**

-NO

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

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

#### **5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):**

-“Every eight to fifteen years they moved their village of 50-100 lodges to clean ground and new hunting areas. In the beginning, it was their custom to build bark lodges; however, this was replaced with idea of teepees borrowed from the Sioux and earthen lodges borrowed from their allies, the [Pawnee](#).” [11]

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

-“Through the late nineteenth century the Omaha were governed by the Council of Seven, whose representatives came from seven specific clans. The council's authority originated from and was sanctioned by the existence and use of two sacred pipes that represented the moiety system. Keepers of the sacred pipes, the sacred tent of war, the sacred buffalo hide, and the sacred pole attended council meetings but had no voting authority. There was no tribal assembly or tribal council. The duties of the Council of Seven included maintaining internal peace and order, securing allies, setting the date of the annual buffalo hunt, and confirming the man who was to act as the leader on that hunt. Soldiers were appointed by the council to carry out its commands and mete out punishment for transgressions of tribal law. Aggressive warfare was sanctioned and controlled by the sacred packs of war. Clans did not have a chief or council, and a clan could not act by itself in a political sense.” [8]

-“There was no serving class to render help to a man or woman, so that the wife could not hire anyone to assist her in any extra labor or in her daily work or her varied avocations...” [9, pg 326]

#### **5.4 Post marital residence:**

-“Post marital residence depends on the resources available from the families of the bride and the groom and may shift between matrilineal and patrilineal before becoming neolocal.” [8]

-“An abusive husband could be turned out, the children would remain with the mother, and the father's male kin were expected to continue to support the family. An immoral wife could be turned out and punished by her husband. Generally, the Omaha did not favor changing the marriage relationship on a whim.” [8]

#### **5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):**

-“They didn't fight over territory but instead to prove their courage, and so Plains Indian war parties rarely fought to the death or destroyed each other's villages.” [2]

#### **5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):**

-“...All girls were routinely escorted by chaperons when outdoors, young men had to wait surreptitiously at the water spring or another location for an opportune moment to talk to a girl.” [8]

-When quite small the two sexes played together but the restraints and duties put on the girls soon separated them from the boys and when girls were grown there were few recreations shared in common by the sexes. [9, 329-330]

#### **5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:**

-“Teasing as a socialization tool is widespread and is applied to both children and adults.” [8]

-“Teasing is a common control tactic.” [8]

#### **5.8 Village and house organization:**

- “During the fall and winter, the Omaha Indians lived in settled villages of round earthen lodges. Omaha lodges were made from wooden frames covered with packed earth. During the spring and summer, the Omahas moved from camp to camp as they followed the buffalo herds. During those times, the Omahas lived in buffalo-hide tents called tipis (or teepees). Tipis were carefully designed to set up and break down quickly. An entire Omaha village could be packed up and ready to move within an hour.” [2]

-“They used earth lodges as dwellings during the winter.” [6]

-“Omaha beliefs were symbolized in their dwelling structures. During most of the year, Omaha Indians lived in earth or sod lodges, ingenious structures with a timber frame and a thick sod covering. At the center of the lodge was a fireplace that recalled their creation myth. The earthlodge entrance faced east, to catch the rising sun and remind the people of their origin and migration upriver from the east. The Huthuga, the circular layout of tribal villages, reflected the tribe's beliefs. Sky people lived in the northern half-circle of the village, the area that symbolized the heavens. Earth people lived in the southern half, which represented the earth. The circle opened to the east. Within each half of the village, the clans or gentes were located based on their members' tribal duties and relationship to other clans. Earth lodges were as large as 60 feet (18 m) in diameter and might hold several families, even their horses.” [6]

### **5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):**

-“...the ground space of a lodge was almost as distinctly marked off as the different rooms in our composite dwellings...the father occupied the middle of the space to the left of the fire as one entered. The mother kept all her household belongings to the left, between the father's place and the entrance. It was...easy for her to slip in and out of the lodge without disturbing any of the inmates when attending to the cooking and getting wood and water. If there were young men in the family, they generally occupied the space near the door to the right, where they were in a position to protect the family should any danger arise. If there were old people, their place was on the right, opposite of the father. The young girls were farther along, more toward the back part.” 9, pg 337]

### **5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?**

-“The willow seats were lounges by day and beds by night.” [9, pg 337]

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

-“The tribe was divided into two moieties or half-tribes, the Sky People (Insta'shunda) and the Earth People (Hon'gashenu).[10] Sky people were responsible for the tribe's spiritual needs and Earth people for the tribe's physical welfare. Each moiety was composed of five clans or gente. Each gens had a hereditary chief, through the male lines, as the tribe had a patrilineal system of descent and inheritance. Children were considered to be born to their father's clan.[8]” [6]

### **5.12 Trade:**

-“The Omahas (and Poncas) traded regularly with other tribes of the Great Plains and the Western Plateau, especially the Pawnee and Wichita. These tribes usually communicated using the Plains Sign Language.” [2, 5]

### **5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?**

-“A man who made light of the authority of the chiefs or the sacred packs of war could be struck with a staff tipped with rattlesnake poison and killed.” [8]

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

6 Time allocation to RCR:

### **6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):**

-“Before the 1900s every clan and subclan had a particular family to which belonged the hereditary right to furnish the keeper of the sacred objects of the clan or tribe together with its rituals and rites. The keeper alone possessed the authority to perform the ceremony. His son would follow him in discharging that duty.” [8]

-“Before allotment several secret societies had knowledge of medicine, roots, plants, and curative practices. Original knowledge was gained through visions or dreams and tended to be specialized within each society.

For example, the *T'éithaethe*, "those whom the buffalo have shown compassion," had knowledge about the curing of wounds. The Omaha utilized a vast pharmacopeia derived from plants, animals, and minerals.” [8]

6.2 Stimulants:

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

-“Family or public feasting marks life events such as births and birthdays, recovery from illness, graduation or social promotion, marriages and anniversaries, homecomings, death, and memorials.” [8]

-“As soon as a child could walk steadily it passed through the ceremony called Turning the Child, and, if a boy, through the supplemental ceremony of cutting the lock of hair in consecration of its like to the Thunder and to the protection of the tribe as a warrior.” [9,pg329]

### **6.4 Other rituals:**

- "The Omaha revere an ancient Sacred Pole, from before the time of their migration to the Missouri, made of cottonwood. It is called Umo<sup>n</sup>ho<sup>n</sup>ti (meaning "The Real Omaha"), and considered to be a person.[12] It was kept in a Sacred Tent in the center of the village, which only men who were members of the Holy Society could enter.[10]" [6]

- "The Sacred Pole is said to represent the body of a man. The name by which it is known, *a-kon-da-bpa*, is the word used to designate the leather bracer worn upon the wrist of an Indian for protection from the bow string (of the weapon of bow and arrow). This name demonstrates that the pole was intended to symbolize a man, as no other creature could wear a bracer. It also indicated that the man thus symbolized was one who was both a provider for and a protector of his people.<sup>[12]</sup>" [6]

#### **6.5 Myths (Creation):**

- "In the beginning the people were in water. They opened their eyes but they could see nothing...as the people came out of the water they beheld the day. As they came forth from the water they were naked and without shame. But after many days passed they desired covering. They took the fiber of weeds and grass and wove it about their loins for covering..." [3]

- "Anthropological literature reports that the Omaha reflected their creation story and the cosmos in their organization: the tribe had two moities, associated with the Sky (male) and maintenance of spiritual traditions, and the Earth (female) and maintenance of the tribe physically. Each has five gentes or clans, which used to be led by hereditary chiefs through the male line. Each gens had a responsibility related to its moiety." [6]

#### **6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):**

- "Singing and drumming are a male role, although women often harmonize during the chorus of the songs. A few males play the cedar flute. Types of dancing are identified by the style of movement and distinctive regalia, including the male traditional war dance (Hethúshka), fancy dance, straight dance, grass dance, female traditional buckskin, traditional cloth, fancy shawl, and jingle dress." [8]

- "Embroidery with porcupine quills was a feminine accomplishment." [9, pg345]

#### **6.7 Sex differences in RCR:**

- "Singing and drumming are a male role, although women often harmonize during the chorus of the songs. A few males play the cedar flute." [8]

#### **6.8 Missionary effect:**

- "Since the early 1900s traditional beliefs have melded with those of multiple denominations of mainstream American [Christianity](#) and the syncretic peyote religion as codified in the Native American Church to produce a complex and sometimes conflicting worldview. The conception of Wakó<sup>n</sup>da has acquired many of the anthropomorphic characteristics associated with the Christian God, including becoming the father of Jesus Christ." [8]

- "The majority of the Omaha maintain a pluralistic religious system through participation in the Native American Church and attenuated traditional Omaha and mainstream Christian ceremonies. Leaders of the Native American Church acquire authority by demonstrating a belief in the church and its worldview, sponsoring prayer meetings, and receiving the ceremonial instruments with the blessing of church leaders through petition or inheritance." [8]

#### **6.9 RCR revival:**

#### **6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:**

- "The body was prepared for burial by the family or the society in which the deceased was a member. Burial usually occurred within a day of death. The deceased was placed in a shallow hilltop grave in a seated position facing east. Poles were arranged over the opening, upon which earth was heaped into a mound. Personal belongings were left at the grave. Some mourners cut their hair or made blood offerings by slashing their forearms." [8]

- "The Omahas believe that after death the spirit travels four days seeking for the path that leads to the home of the dead. To find this road is not so hard for an adult, but a child experiences much difficulty. The path is visible to us as the "milky way." To assist the dead as they wander forth, a fire is kept burning at the grave during four nights; by that time it is supposed that the path is reached. The spirit then passes on to where the way divides; at this fork an old man sits; he wears in his hair the sacred downy eagle feather and is clad in a skin robe, the hair outside, the head of the animal resting on the left arm, the tail on the right; the robe is always worn in this manner on occasions of solemnity. As the spirit reaches the place where the old man sits, he looks and smiles at those whose lives have been in accordance with the Indian ideal; that is, men valiant, faithful to friends, relentless to foes, just, slow to quarrel, unailing in hospitality, and exact

in all ceremonial observances. To such a spirit the old man points the direction to be taken, indicating the short branch of the "milky way." The spirit passes on, obeying the sign; no word is spoken by either. Those whose lives have not been worthy, travel on, unheeding the muffled figure, and are unnoticed by him; these do not turn aside toward the short way, but continue over the zenith and wander on endlessly, always alone, and with increasing sorrowfulness of heart." [7]

-“Food was left at the grave as a token of remembrance.” [8]

-“A suicide ceases to exist: for him there is no hereafter.” [7]

-“The spirit of a murderer never reached the afterworld but was forced to wander the earth.” [8]

-“Heaven is thought to be a place like this world, having mountains, streams, valleys, prairies, and woods filled with game and beautiful with verdure. The vocations are the same as here; the men hunt, the women weave, the children play. Each one enters heaven as he left this world; the adult is still an adult, the child a child. Friends welcome each other and relations are reunited. Enmities are at an end. Sickness and hunger are not suffered there; but sorrow comes when the second death sunders those who are dear to each other. There is said to be a succession of heavens, each one better than the preceding. How many of these heavens there are, no one could state to me. Each succeeding heaven is reached as was the first, the person dying in the heaven where he may be, and entering the next above him; those whom he has left behind, wailing over his departure.” [7]

### **6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?**

-No known taboo, but after a death from war “...As the relatives of the dead heard the name of father, husband or brother, they broke into wailing...cries of sorrow for the dead.” [9, pg432]

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

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

-“The Omaha believed in a continuous and invisible life force called *Wakō'da*. This force manifested itself in the duality of motion and the action of mind and body as well as in the permanency of structure and form in the physical environment. This duality was further developed in the conceptualization of the universe as containing male and female parts whose union perpetuated order in all living things, including people's lives. Religious rites and social organizations such as the huthuga moiety system and the presence of two principal chiefs symbolized this concept.” [8]

-“The myths seem to indicate a linking together of all forms of life throughout nature. The various animals are endowed with speech, and address each other by terms of relationship, and are so addressed by man. The beaver, eagle, and others are called grandfather or grandmother, the titles of respect; but in the various myths these terms are not always applied to the same animal.” [7]

-“The otter seems to be connected with the supernatural. Its skin is twisted about the neck of a man in order to promote the swoon, which will bring prophetic vision. Its skin is used in the sacred society when a part of the ceremony consists in the simulation of death.” [7]

-“...The Omaha was strongly anthropomorphic in its outlook on nature. Everything lived and partook of man's qualities. This is clearly shown in the ritual of the corn (p. 261), in the address to the stone in the sweat-lodge ritual (p.577), and in other rites and rituals...” [9, pg609]

## **7. Adornment**

### **7.1 Body paint:**

-The Omaha painted themselves for many different reasons. [9]

### **7.2 Piercings:**

-“...Earrings were worn. Piercing the ears was a soctly ceremony, each hole generally representing the gift of a pony to the man who did the piercing; so the number of holes in a man's ears was an indication of the wealth of his near kinred.” [9, pg438]

-“...ceremonial piercing of the nose during the tattooing ceremony.” [9, pg615]

### **7.3 Haircut:**

-“Omaha (and Ponca) women usually wore their hair in two long braids. Omaha warriors often wore their hair in the Mohawk style or shaved their heads completely except for a scalplock (one long lock of hair on top of their heads). Sometimes they added a porcupine roach to make this hairstyle more impressive.” [2, 5]

-“The four winds are recognized when the hair of a child is [cut] for the first time by the old man whose duty it is to perform the ceremony. He lifts the child from its feet and turns it slowly around four times, letting the child's feet touch the ground at each of the four quarters, in honor of the four winds. After that the child is urged forward a few steps, and has thus entered upon the path of life.” [7]

### **7.4 Scarification/Tattoos:**

-“When a pipe is smoked ceremonially it is lifted to the four quarters. The rattles and tobacco-pouch which accompany the sacred peace-pipes have painted around them a green band with four projecting lines. The same device is tattooed upon the breast and [back] of a young girl, whose father has acquired certain honors derived through these pipes.” [7]

-“In these same ceremonies the sun is symbolized by a small blue spot tattooed on the forehead of the girl who has the mark of the four winds put upon her. A circle is painted in red upon the breasts of two men, whose duty it is to take a certain part in the ceremonies connected with the pipes. The sun is also typified in the streamers on the sacred peace pipes, and by the head of the large redheaded woodpecker.” [7]

-“Sometimes a crescent moon was tattooed on the back of the girl’s neck and a turtle on the back of her hands. The turtle was connected with rites pertaining to water and wind...during the ordeal of the tattooing the girl strove to make no sound or outcry. If she were to do so it was considered as evidence that she had been unchaste. If the healing process was rapid, it was considered a good omen.” [9, pg506]

-“...tattooing was reserved for the highly honored women of the *Hōhewachi*, (Night Blessed Society).” [8]

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

-“An Omaha warrior’s shirt was fringed and often decorated with porcupine quills, beadwork, and tribal designs.” [2]

-“Later, Omaha people adapted European costume such as cloth dresses and vests, which they also decorated with quillwork and fancy beading.” [2]

### 7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

#### **7.7 Sex differences in adornment:**

-“Omaha (and Ponca) women wore long deerskin dresses.” [2, 5]

-“Omaha (and Ponca) men wore breechcloths with leather leggings and buckskin shirts.”

- Both “wore moccasins on their feet, and in cold weather, they wore long buffalo-hide robes.” [2, 5]

#### **7.8 Missionary effect:**

- “A school was built for the mission on land claimed by the Omaha tribe and several Omaha children were brought under the influence of the teachers.” [9, pg626]

### 7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

## **8. Kinship systems**

### **8.1 Sibling classification system:**

- In addition to brothers and sisters “ *Parallel cousins* in the first generation are referred to as "Brother" and "Sister." The traditional Omaha kinship system is used as a model for one of the major kinship terminology classification systems for cousin terms.” [8]

### **8.2 Sororate, levirate:**

-“Sororate and levirate marriage rules help hold the family together, especially in terms of supporting children after the death of a parent.” [8]

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

-“Kinship follows a bifurcate merging pattern. *Cross cousins* are referred to as "Aunt" and "Uncle." As generational distance increases, these terms are often modified to "Little Aunt" and "Little Uncle." *Parallel cousins* in the first generation are referred to as "Brother" and "Sister." The traditional Omaha kinship system is used as a model for one of the major kinship terminology classification systems for cousin terms.” [8]

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

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