

Parent-in-Law Avoidances of Northern Athapaskans and Algonquians

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RÉSUMÉ

Cet article fait l'analyse des habitudes de formalité et de circonspection qui prédominent dans les relations sociales entre les beaux-parents et les enfants des peuples Athapaskan et Algonquin du nord. Les explications génériques traditionnelles telle que "la peur de l'inceste" ne suffisent pas à bien décrire ces coutumes. On peut mieux comprendre ces proscriptions chez les Athapaskans et les Algonquins si on les considère comme résultant des rapports qui existeraient entre la possibilité des conflits de rang et le besoin de coopération économique.

INTRODUCTION

Parent-in-law avoidances can be defined as prescriptions of patterned formality and circumspection between parents-in-law and children-in-law. Such relationships have worldwide distribution. Many anthropologists have postulated blanket explanations of parent-in-law avoidances, but parent-in-law avoidances have not been studied intensively by anthropologists. This paper supports the hypothesis that the parent-in-law avoidances of the Northern Athapaskan and Algonquian Indians of Canada and Alaska cannot be readily explained in terms of "blanket explanations" such as "incest fear." This paper partially fulfills Lowie's repeated plea (1920:107; 1948:86) for a study of the social contexts in which parent-in-law avoidances occur within a category of societies related by geographic and historic ties.

The first section of this text is a summary of some well-known anthropologists' views concerning avoidance relationships. The second section of the text is a discussion of the relationship

between methodology and the principle theories of the origin of avoidance. The third section of the text is a study of the social context in which the typical Northern Athapaskan and Algonquian male to male parent-in-law avoidance occurs. The fourth section of the text is an explanation of the extensions of avoidance relationships from the typical male to male parent-in-law relationship in accordance with uxorilocal and virilocal residence. Finally, the conclusion of the paper contains a summary of Northern Athapaskan and Algonquian parent-in-law avoidances and their relationship to the focal male to male parent-in-law avoidance. This pattern of extension of avoidance is nearly the opposite of that predicted by "incest fear" theorists. I conclude that Northern Athapaskan and Algonquian parent-in-law avoidances cannot be explained in terms of "incest fear."

REVIEW OF PAST STUDIES

Incest Fear

Frazer (1913:77-81, 84, 95; 1911 III:331-4), Freud (1912: 30-33), Rivers (1924:66), Murdock (1949:273-277), Stephens and D'Andrade (1962:134-138), and Driver (1966:134, 141) postulate that avoidance relationships are the result of "incest fear." According to this theory an individual's strong sexual attraction to his opposite-sexed parent is marked by a deeply internalized incest fear. This strong sexual attraction is extended to opposite-sexed parents-in-law and opposite-sexed siblings who are not protected by deeply internalized incest fear. These less strongly internalized incest fears must be bulwarked with avoidance relationships as external precautionary measures. Opposite-sexed parents-in-law are the focal points of avoidance. All other avoidances, even avoidance relationships between individuals of the same sex, are extensions from the two focal opposite sex parent-in-law avoidances.

Parsons (1916), Reichard (1938), Lowie (1920:84-97, 101-107; 1948:85) and Thomas (1937:214) are outspoken critics of the incest fear theory. Parsons (1916:289) challenges incest fear theorists with a long list of hard to explain Melanesian male to

male avoidances, Reichard (1938:268) and Lowie (1948:85) attack the incest fear theory for its failure to explain avoidance between individuals of the same sex. Thomas (1937:210-234) not only compiles a long list of male to male and female to female avoidances but reports that such same-sex avoidances are sometimes practiced in the absence of cross-sex avoidances. Thomas also notes a long list of avoidance practices (including the ritual intercourse between a man and his avoided mother-in-law) which are difficult to explain in terms of incest fear.

Functionalism

Tylor (1889:247-248) postulates that avoidance relationships arise as status marking devices between an individual and his spouse's natal family. Similarly, Parsons (1916:286-289) finds avoidances to be rooted in rigid status relationships (such as the relationship between affines, pairs of brothers and fathers and sons in certain areas of Melanesia). Reichard (1938:228) suggests that Southern Athapaskan, and Plains and Prairie Siouan and Algonquian avoidances arise from the status implications of economic obligations. Eggan (1955:75-81) suggests that formalized kin relationships originate as mechanisms which provide some degree of cooperation between individuals whose relative kin statuses dictate conflict. Radcliffe-Brown (1940, 1952) considers most of these factors in his statements about functional interdependencies concerning social disjunction and social conjunction. Briefly, Radcliffe-Brown (1952:91-92) has said that avoidances arise from the coincidence of statuses which simultaneously involve both cooperation and competition.

Geographic and Historic

Lowie (1920:84-97, 101-107) is not impressed by psychological and functional explanations of the origins of avoidances. Rather he concerns himself with geographical and historical factors which might effect, limit, or determine the distribution of these phenomena. Driver (1966:144-147) also considers ways in which geographical and historic factors might effect the distribution of patterns of North American parent-in-law avoidance.

RELATIONSHIP OF METHODOLOGY TO
PRINCIPLE THEORIES*Incest Fear*

The method of this paper with respect to the incest fear theory involves the listing of data which seem to negate basic principles of the "incest fear" theory. For example, in his statistical study of North American parent-in-law avoidance Driver (1966:141) cites only eight societies in which a man avoids his son-in-law but does not avoid his daughter-in-law. He lists twenty-six societies in which a man avoids his daughter-in-law but does not avoid his son-in-law. Driver concludes that since the cross-sex avoidance is more common than the same sex avoidance, "cross-sex avoidances appear to have evolutionary and historical as well as psychological priority. Same-sex avoidance apparently arise from them by extension..." Although for North America in general it may be more common for a man to avoid his daughter-in-law than his son-in-law, the reverse is true for Northern Athapaskans and Algonquians. A man avoids his son-in-law but not his daughter-in-law among the Cree (Mason 1967:49; Franklin 1823:63; Skinner 1914:72; Curtis 1928:74; Godsell 1938:109; Honigmann 1956a:61), Chipewyan (Curtis 1928:41), Kaska (Honigmann 1954:77; 1959:516), Northern Tutchone (MacNeish 1957:50), Teslin (McClellan 1961:111) and Sarsi (Curtis 1928: 107-108, 161; Honigmann 1956b:33). I find no report of a Northern Athapaskan or Algonquian society in which a man avoids his daughter-in-law but does not avoid his son-in-law. Using Driver's criteria (see above) one might conclude that Northern Athapaskan and Algonquian father-in-law to daughter-in-law avoidance arises by extension from father-in-law to son-in-law avoidance.

Driver (1966:134) and Stephens and D'Andrade (1962:137-138) contend that fear of incest between a man and his mother-in-law is the primary cause of all avoidance relationships. However, a Chipewyan man must avoid his father-in-law, but specifically does not avoid his mother-in-law (Curtis 1928:41). Similarly, Honigmann (1956a:62-62) notes that an Attawapiskat Cree man avoids his father-in-law more strongly than he avoids his mother-

in-law. The Slave, Tahltan, Ahtena, Teslin, and Sekani allow a man to marry his mother-in-law upon the death of his father-in-law (Petitot 1891:389; Honigmann 1946:72; Emmons 1911:99; Teit 1956:149-150; Jenness 1937:54; McClellan 1961:110-114). The data indicate that for many Northern Athapaskan and Algonquians a man's relationship with his mother-in-law depends upon his relationship to his father-in-law.

Functionalism

Many functionalist arguments depend upon the principle that rules of behavior arise from previously existing behavior. According to this principle the previously existing behavior enforces the new rule of behavior, and the new rule of behavior reinforces the old behavior. I avoid the pitfall of logical circularity of functionalism by concerning myself with interrelationships of avoidances with other elements of Northern Athapaskan and Algonquian culture rather than with the origins of avoidances.

Geographic and Historic

The Northern Athapaskan and Algonquian are a geographic and historic unit. The geographic unity of those peoples depends on their common residence within a single contiguous ecological formation. Their common economics, based on trapping and trading, reflect their common history. The geographic and historic unity of the Northern Athapaskan and Algonquian makes generalizations about their cultures possible. A large portion of this text arises from general impressions gained from a wide reading of the literature and from casual contacts with Algonkin, Ojibwa and Cree Indians in Quebec and Ontario. (I spent the summers of 1960, 1961, and 1962 in the company of Mattawa Algonkins and "half-breeds" travelling by canoe in Northern Ontario. During that time I visited the Ojibwa and Cree villages at Bear Island, Nakina, Skibi Lake, Miminiska Lake, Fort Hope, Ogoki, and Fort Albany.) I believe, for example, that Knight's (1968:57-58) description of the division of labor by age at Rupert House is a good description of the general Northern Athapaskan and Algonquian pattern of division of labor by age.

SOCIAL CONTEXT OF THE MALE-MALE PARENT-IN-LAW RELATIONSHIP

Uxorivincinal Residence

Carrasco (1963) suggests the use of the adjective "uxorivincinal" to describe the rule of post marital residence by which a man is required to live in the vicinity of his parents-in-law. The rule of uxorivincinal residence dictates that a man must live near his parents-in-law but does not exclude the possibility that he may live with his own parents. A man who weds a woman of his own vicinity must fulfill the prescription of uxorivincinal residence, but he may also happen to practice virilocal residence. The prescription of uxorivincinal residence, although it can be easily masked by a statistical preference for virilocal residence, is an important key to the understanding of Northern Athapaskan and Algonquian parent-in-law avoidances. McClellan (1964:9) explains the rule of uxorivincinal post marital residence and notes the possibility of virilocal residence.

Most of the Athapaskans whom I know seem to structure the marriage situation primarily in terms of the son-in-law's obligation to care for the wife's parents until their deaths, not a matter of initial matrilocal residence, even though this is the usual consequence. It is really a continuation of an attitude which begins with 'bride service.' After the death of the wife's parents, or if another son-in-law elects to care for them, the couple may return to the locality where the husband grew up (McClellan 1964:9).

There is a long list of references to the obligation of a Northern Athapaskan and Algonquian son-in-law to reside near and provide for his father-in-law: Malecite (Mechling 1958:31-35); Abenaki (Hallowell 1926:130; Montagnais (Burgess 1944:3; 1945:10; Leacock 1955:34); Nascapi (Turner 1894:276; Lips 1947:421); Ojibwa (Jeness 1935:99; Rogers 1962:B30; Dunning 1959: 121-122); Cree (Mason 1967:49; Honigmann 1956:62-63); Plains Cree (Mandelbaum 1940:246); Chipewyan (Curtis 1928:41; Birket-Smith 1930:68); Beaver (Jeness 1932:384; Goddard 1916: 221); Slave (Honigmann 1946:69-70, 85, 162; Helm 1961: 67); Yellow Knife (Mason 1946:32; Pike 1892:121); Satudene (Osgood 1931:77-88); Sarsi (Curtis 1928:107-108; Jenness 1938: 23-26; Sekani (Jeness 1937:53-54); Kaska (Honigmann 1949:

129, 193, 199; 1954:131-133); Tahltan (Emmons 1911:28, 98-99; Teit 1956:146); Tanajna (Osgood 1937:164); Kutchin (Balicki 1963:28, 43-44; Osgood 1936:164); Upper Tanana (McKenna 1959:118-120); and Ahtena, Southern Tutchone, and Tagish (McClellan 1961:108-109; 1964:9).

Status Implications of Economic Tasks

The economic cooperation involved in a son-in-law's obligation to his father-in-law and the status implications of this obligation are related to Northern Athapaskan and Algonquian avoidance relationships. Dunning (1959:88-89) describes one way in which status implications seem to arise from the nature of certain economic tasks and become attached to kin relationships among Northern Ojibwa.

Throughout the variety of the work cycle there are jobs differing in prestige. On an ordinary canoe trip, the position of sternman, while on a shooting expedition the bowman, is the one of prestige. Elder brothers always take the position of higher status. In winter on the trail, the senior man drives the dogs, while his junior runs ahead to break trail. And when walking to the post in summer or winter, the elder brother goes first, and is dealt with first by the company trader. Sometimes, although he enters first, he directs his juniors to be dealt with first, in order that he may keep abreast of gossip and perhaps dominate the conversation in front of the store. When the group of trappers have finished selling furs and buying supplies, the senior person of the group leaves first to lead his dog team or carry off his supplies.

General Impressions of the Division of Labor by Age

The son-in-law is obliged to provide meat for his father-in-law's families (Honigmann 1949:79, 193). His constant quest for moose, caribou, or bear take him to remote hills, mountains, and swamps along the watersheds which form the boundaries of his father-in-law's hunting territory. The country in which the young son-in-law travels is often so rugged that it is impossible for him to use a canoe or sled. His hunting keeps him away from home for days or even weeks at a time and he sleeps alone in the cold. The quest for meat may require so much of his time that he has no time to devote to trapping profitable fur-bearing animals (Leacock 1954:25, 36-37).

A man with a young son-in-law is freed from the task of hunting large game animals and can concentrate on trapping profitable fur bearers (Honigmann 1949:129). The major stream at the center of his hunting territory is the home of beaver, otter, and mink and serves as a natural highway for either canoe or sled. Thus, he travels comfortably on his daily rounds of his trapline and returns home every night to the warmth of his family.

But, eventually the father-in-law grows old, must restrict his trapping activities, and loses part of his masculine status. He traps only in the most accessible or productive parts of his territory and spends much of his time at home making and repairing snow shoes, dog sleds, canoes, etc., for his son-in-law (Leacock 1954:34). As he grows older still he rarely leaves sight of home, and must cooperate with boys and young women in lowly activities such as snaring muskrats and rabbits, or tending fish nets. As a final stage in the loss of his male status an old man may be reduced to gathering wood and preparing hides, activities which involve cooperation and equality with young girls and old women. As the father-in-law ages the son-in-law gradually spends more time trapping. The son-in-law accumulates more and more masculine activities until he acquires a son-in-law and can restrict his hunting activities and concentrate on trapping (Knight 1968:57-58).

EXTENSIONS OF THE MALE-MALE PARENT-IN-LAW RELATIONSHIP

Uxorilocally Coresident Pairs

I have described some of the grounds for conflict between an uxorilocally resident son-in-law and his father-in-law. As a stranger in the household the son-in-law becomes involved in an intense competition with his father-in-law. This tension seems to be directly related to the wide-spread father-in-law to son-in-law avoidance relationship (see Table I). A father-in-law and son-in-law must cooperate in at least some economic activities, and this avoidance relationship is not entirely practical. Tension and competition between two men might well be a factor in the way in which the men relate to each other's wives. On page 185 of this text it is noted that a Northern Athapaskan and Algonquian man's

relationship with his mother-in-law seems to depend on his relationship with his father-in-law. I feel that the Northern Athapaskan and Algonquian avoidance relationship between a man and his mother-in-law has functional value as a check to the status conflict between a man and his father-in-law. The Northern Athapaskan and Algonquian division of labor according to sex and age requires little economic cooperation between a man and his mother-in-law. Therefore, a man's mother-in-law avoidance is a more practical marker of his relationship to his father-in-law than his father-in-law avoidance. On the basis of the minimal need for economic cooperation it might be predicted that the son-in-law to mother-in-law avoidance would be the most widespread Northern Athapaskan and Algonquian parent-in-law avoidance (see Table I).

Virilocally Coresident Pairs

In societies where virilocal residence is statistically common a man often works for his own father on his father's hunting territory. Although conflict between the father and son may be lessened by their constant association, father-son avoidances are practiced among the Kutchin, Ahtena, Tanana, Tena, Attawapiskat Cree and various Ojibwa groups (Slobodin 1962:42; McClellan 1961:116-116; Honigmann 1956a:60-61; 1959:971; Landes 1937:30; Brown 1952:59; Bott 1949:48-52, 60-67; Dunning 1959:111). Since a man's relationship to his father-in-law dictates that he avoid his father-in-law's wife, it might be predicted that a man's relationship to his son-in-law would also dictate that he avoid his son-in-law's wife. Practicality might limit avoidance between a man and his daughter (son-in-law's wife) due to the economic cooperation of old men and young women. In fact in some Northern Athapaskan and Algonquian societies (Ahtena, Tena, Tanana, Kutchin, Attawapiskat Cree, and various Ojibwa) a man does avoid his daughter (McClellan 1961:116-117; Slobodin 1962:42; Honigmann 1956a:60-61; 1959:971; Landes 1937:30; Brown 1952:59; Bott 1949:48-52; 60-67; Dunning 1959:111). Thus the data provide confirmation of the theory that mother-in-law avoidance is an extension of the father-in-law relationship. In a few Northern Athapaskan and Algonquian societies (Kutchin, and various Ojibwa) the relationship between a mother and her own daughter

mirrors the competition between a father-in-law and son-in-law and the conflict is reflected in mother-daughter avoidance (Slobodin 1962:42; Honigmann 1956a:61; Landes 1937:30; Brown 1952:59; Bott 1949:48-52, 60-67; Dunning 1959:111). This avoidance relationship is rare and is usually obscured by a bond of constant association and economic cooperation. As might be predicted, the father-son relationship is further marked by avoidance of each other's wives. Although an old man may cooperate in economic activities with young women, a man avoids his son's wife (see Table I). Similarly, although the relationship is tempered by long and close association, among the Kutchin (Slobodin 1962:42), Tanana (McClellan 1961:116-117), Attawapiskat Cree (Honigmann 1956a:60-61), and Ojibwa (Landes 1937:30; Brown 1952:59; Bott 1949:48-52, 60-67; Dunning 1959:111) a man avoids his own mother (father's wife). Economic cooperation often links a woman and her daughter-in-law in such a way that avoidance is extremely impractical (Mandelbaum 1940:233). Mother-in-law and daughter-in-law do avoid each other in many societies, but this is the least common parent-in-law avoidance (see Table I).

CONCLUSION

I have shown that Northern Athapaskan and Algonquian parent-in-law avoidances can be explained in terms of the interrelation of status conflicts and the need for economic cooperation. Reports of avoidance between a man and his son-in-law are far more common than reports of avoidance between a man and his daughter-in-law (see Table I). A man does not avoid his son-in-law because of "incest fear." The avoidance between a man and his son-in-law depends upon the functional need to reduce the tension and conflict of their relationship. A man may also avoid his daughter-in-law, but the frequency of this avoidance practice is limited by the economic cooperation which often unites an old man and a young woman (see Table I). A woman has almost no opportunity to engage in economic cooperation with her son-in-law, and avoidance between a woman and her son-in-law is wide spread (see Table I). A woman and her virilocally resident daughter-in-law are tied by almost constant association and econ-

omic cooperation, and mother-in-law to daughter-in-law is the least common form of parent-in-law avoidance (see Table I). The pattern of the extension of Northern Athapaskan and Algonquian is nearly the opposite of that which is predicted by the "incest fear" theory! These avoidances cannot be understood in terms of "incest fear."

I have shown that incest fear does not cause the parent-in-law avoidances of the Northern Athapaskans and Algonquians. The Northern Athapaskans and Algonquians are human. Therefore, incest fear cannot be the cause of the parent-in-law avoidances of humans in general. At least, it seems that the whole question of the relationship between incest fear and parent-in-law avoidance should be investigated more deeply.

TABLE I — PARENT-IN-LAW AVOIDANCES OF THE NORTHERN ATHAPASKANS AND ALGONQUIANS

+ indicates presence of the avoidance

— indicates absence of the avoidance

O indicates no report of the avoidance

Column I	Column II	Column III	Column IV
Structured status competition between father-in-law and son-in-law is frequently marked by avoidance. This relationship seems not to be due to incest fear.	Economic cooperation between father-in-law and daughter-in-law reduces the practicality of avoidance between members of this pair. According to incest fear theorists this avoidance should be far more common than father-in-law to son-in-law avoidance.	Almost no economic cooperation unites the mother-in-law to her son-in-law, and this is the most practical avoidance. Incest fear theorists say that all avoidances must arise from this relationship. Both theories predict this avoidance to be common.	Strong ties of economic cooperation unite the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law and greatly reduce practicality of avoidance between the pair.

	Column I	Column II	Column III	Column IV	
Athapaskans in general	O	O	+	O	Jenness 1932:369
Kutchin	+	+	+	+	Slobodin 1962:42
Tanana ¹	+	+	+	+	McClellan 1961:116
Ahtena ²	+	+	+	—	McClellan 1961:105
Northern Tutchone	+	—	+	—	MacNeish 1957:50
Teslin ³	+	—	+	—	McClellan 1961:111
Tahltan	O	O	+	O	Emmons 1911:98-99; Teit 1956:144, 150
Tsantsant	O	O	+	O	Jenness 1932:369
Kaska	+	—	+	—	Honigmann 1949: 130-131; 1954:77
Hare	+	+	+	+	MacNeish 1960:290
Slave	+	+	+	+	Honigmann 1946:64
Beaver	+	+	+	+	Goddard 1916:221- 222; Harmon 1905: 250, 269, 295
Sekani	+	+	+	+	Jenness 1932:384; Harmon 1905:250, 269
Bulkey River Carrier ⁴	+	+	+	+	Harmon 1905:250, 269
Chipewyan	+	—	—	—	Curtis 1928:41, 148

¹ McClellan states that "avoidance of affinal relatives was the 'worst' especially that between a mother-in-law and son-in-law" (McClellan 1961:116). Thus she seems to imply other affinal avoidances.

² McClellan states that an Ahtena man is obligated to serve and hunt for his father-in-law (McClellan 1961:108-109; 1964:9) and she states that among the Ahtena the strength of avoidance between two people is proportional to the strength of the obligation of one to care for the other (McClellan 1961:108). Thus she seems to imply father-in-law to son-in-law avoidance.

³ The Teslin are included here because they seem to be Tlingitized Athapaskans.

⁴ Harmon lived with the Nipigon Ojibwa, Cree, Beaver, Sekani, Bulkey Carrier, and Central Carrier; he reports that except for the Central Carrier, all of the groups with which he was acquainted practiced the avoidance of all parents-in-law by all children-in-law.

	Column I	Column II	Column III	Column IV	
Sarsi	+	—	+	—	Curtis 1928: 108, 161; Honigmann 1956b:33
Plains Cree	+	+	+	—	Mandelbaum 1940:233
Cumberland House Cree	+	—	+	—	Franklin 1823:63
Eastern Woods Cree-					Skinner 1911:57, 72
Montagnais	+	—	+	—	
Western Woods Cree	+	—	+	—	Curtis 1928: 41, 74, 156
Southern Manitoba Cree	+	—	+	—	Godsell 1938:109
Oxford House Cree	+	—	+	—	Mason 1967:49
Plains Ojibwa	○	○	+	○	Tanner 1820:146; Hilger 1959:124; Howard 1964:70
Rainy Lake Ojibwa	+	+	+	+	Landes 1937:25-30
Berrens River Ojibwa	+	+	+	+	Dunning 1959: 121-123
Minnesota Ojibwa	+	+	+	+	Brown 1952:59; Bott 1949:48-52, 60-67
Nipigon Ojibwa	+	+	+	+	Harmon 1905:250, 269, 295
Sachigo Ojibwa	+	+	+	+	Rogers 1962:B32
Bearskin Ojibwa	+	+	+	+	Rogers 1962:B32
Big Beaverhouse Ojibwa	+	+	+	+	Rogers 1962:B32
Big Trout Lake Ojibwa	+	+	+	+	Rogers 1962:B32

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