

A Function of Marriage Ceremony

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RÉSUMÉ

Cet article étudie la cérémonie du mariage comme un rite de passage et analyse le changement éprouvé par l'individu après son mariage. Les résultats de cette étude semblent indiquer qu'au moins une des fonctions de cette cérémonie est d'aider l'individu dans une société rigide du point de vue sexuel à s'adapter à un nouveau style de vie.

Since the mid-1950's, several important works on the phenomena collectively known as the "rites of passage" have appeared. However, although there are some exceptions (Eliade 1965:129ff.; Gluckman 1962; Leach 1961:132-136), most of these works deal only with puberty rites (Bettelheim 1954; Burton & Whiting 1961; Brown 1963; Cohen 1964; Henderson 1967; Whiting, Kluckhohn, & Anthony 1958; Young 1965), and it appears that relatively little attention has been paid to other forms of rite of passage. The purpose of this paper is to examine marriage ceremony by generalizing an assumption underlying certain studies of puberty rites.

PROBLEM

One of the basic assumptions found in several studies of puberty rites is that a rite of passage is conducted in order to deal with a significant change or adjustment of some kind on the part of the self. For example, the puberty rite is seen as a means to interfere with the son's strong Oedipus attachment to his mother due to an exclusive mother-infant sleeping arrangement and/or a long post-partum sexual taboo (Whiting, Kluckhohn,

& Anthony 1958) or to interfere with the son's cross-sex identification with his mother (Burton & Whiting 1961), or to let the boy realize that he must become a member of society at large (Cohen 1964). One of the hypotheses in a study by Brown (1963:843) is that in societies in which patrilocal residence is practiced, if there is also an exclusive mother-infant sleeping arrangement, the girl in these societies tends to have an intense puberty rite, because she first envies her mother but after marriage she must live in a male dominated household. In all of these studies, it is assumed that a puberty rite is conducted in order to rectify an adolescent's old attitudes towards the social environment to which he or she has been accustomed until that time. In a sense, then, a rite of passage can be seen as one form of forced attitude change.

Theoretically, this may be stated as follows. One's life may be seen as a series of fairly well defined stages. Each stage is relatively static, and because of this reason, one develops certain attitudes in response to various phenomena in the social environment associated with each stage. The attitudes and social environments are mutually interdependent on each other. Attitudes are reinforced through cognition of the corresponding social environment, and the boundary of each social environment is defined by the corresponding set of attitudes. Certain specific norms of society are enforced on an individual who is in a certain specific stage, and when these norms are properly translated into his cognitive and emotive structures, the norms are internalized as his attitudes. For example, an unmarried girl may develop certain attitudes towards the self, parents, life, sexual behaviour and so on, in accordance with the norms of her society. She thinks and behaves as she is expected to do in terms of the norms of the society.

However, when it becomes necessary for an individual to move to the next stage in his life cycle, where a new social environment and a corresponding set of attitudes are present, because of habituation, he may not be able to discard the old attitudes of the previous stage and to adjust to the new social environment easily. A rite of passage can be seen as a means of moving an individual from one stage to the next, where new attitudes towards the new social environment must be developed.

By forcing an individual to change his old attitudes, society achieves the purpose of transition.

From a purely empirical point of view, in order to reduce or eliminate one's old attitudes, some form of empirical experience is needed. By experiencing certain significant phenomena in connection with a significant change in one's life, one may be able to deal with the transition more easily. A rite of passage may be considered as a category of phenomenal arrangements in which various forms of experience are presented to the individual who is faced with a new social environment. The importance and necessity of sensory experience for the normal functioning of man indicated by the studies of sensory deprivation (see, e.g., Heron 1961) suggest that the presentation of sensual stimuli is a very important means of dealing with an individual's state of mind.

This reasoning further implies that if the change in one's attitudes after the transition must be great, a large amount of energy must be expended in order to create a phenomenally impressive experience. In contrast, if the change is small, only a small amount of energy is needed, if it is necessary at all, in order to create some kind of specific experience in connection with the transition. Therefore, the following postulate may be presented.

Postulate 1: The greater the difference between one's attitudes before and after the transition, the more elaborate the rite of passage which one experiences.

If marriage is seen in terms of Postulate 1, there are several conceivable changes which are significant enough from the standpoint of the self's experience. For example, the girl in an exogamous society may need a more significant change in attitudes as compared with the girl in an endogamous society if she must become a member of a different community after marriage. A similar reasoning may be applicable to the difference between unilineal societies on the one hand and ambilineal, bilateral, or double descent societies on the other, because if one is a member of a unilineal society and is required to discard one's lineage after marriage, a significant attitude change may be

necessary as compared with marriage in an ambilineal, bilateral, or double descent society.

However, a possibility in which a most significant change in attitude is required has to do with the norms of sexual behaviour. That is, if one is strictly prohibited from engaging in premarital sexual behaviour, one is likely to face a difficulty at marriage, because hetero-sexual behaviour is not only permitted but also expected after marriage. In such a situation, a prohibition suddenly becomes a permission and requirement. This entails a most drastic change in attitude towards sex. From this, it may be possible to say that one conceivable function of marriage ceremony is to help the self to go through this change in attitude towards sexual behaviour. In order to deal with such a drastic change, it is conceivable that an elaborate marriage ceremony is practiced in societies in which premarital sexual behaviour is strictly forbidden. In contrast, if society is tolerant or permissive towards premarital sexual behaviour, marriage may not require such a drastic change in attitude. This implies that marriage ceremony does not have to be elaborate in such a society. It may become more or less a matter of formality, and it can be very simple or even completely absent. Since it appears that throughout the world, the norms of premarital sexual behaviour apply either to both men and women or to women only and are not enforced on men only, this reasoning can be expressed as a hypothesis dealing with the norms of premarital sexual behaviour for females.

Hypothesis 1: In societies in which premarital sexual behaviour is strictly forbidden for females, marriage ceremony is likely to be elaborate, as compared with societies in which premarital sexual behaviour is tolerated or accepted.

METHOD

In order to test Hypothesis 1, sample cultures were drawn from the HRAF quality control sample universe (*Behavior Science Notes* 1967:81-88). This sample universe is based on Murdock's 60 culture areas (1957), and one culture was drawn randomly from each culture area. A sample was drawn from

the "A" quality cultures first, and for those culture areas in which only the "B" quality cultures were available, a separate sample was drawn afterwards.

The sample cultures thus obtained were then examined in regard to the degree of elaboration of marriage ceremony through the reading of the HRAF files (Index No. 585). The informations on the norms of premarital sexual behaviour for females were obtained from Column 78 of Murdock's *Ethnographic Atlas* (1967). Categories P and V of Column 78 were combined and considered as "strict", and Categories A, F, and T were also combined and considered as "permissive". Category E includes those cultures in which the problem of premarital sexual behaviour is not applicable because of early marriage of females. For this reason, the sample cultures belonging to this category were excluded from the sample. If a given sample culture was inadequate as regards at least one of the two needed informations, it was substituted by another culture of the same culture area whenever possible. In two culture areas (Plains and Prairie of North America) the HRAF files were inadequate in regard to the information on the elaboration of marriage ceremony, and ethnographic monographs on the Cheyenne (Dorsey 1884:260) and the Omaha (Grinnell 1923:142-144) were used for these areas. In this way, 52 cultures were examined for the testing of Hypothesis 1.

The data on the elaboration of marriage ceremony were coded by the author into two categories: (1) none or very simple, and (2) reasonably elaborate or elaborate. The criteria used for this dichotomy were the presence or absence of (1) a bridal procession, (2) a feast, (3) music or dance, and (4) a game or horseplay. In addition, such minor factors as the presence or absence of body painting, special wedding clothes, an oath before a third party such as a priest, and an instruction to the couple were secondarily taken into account. In order to avoid any possibility of bias as much as possible, the coding was done first without the knowledge of Column 78. Practically in all cases, the dichotomization of the sample cultures into two categories was clear-cut. Only one culture (Cheyenne) was on the borderline in this regard.

Two cultures presented a different kind of problem. Among the Navaho, common law marriage is widely practiced, and in this case, there is no marriage ceremony. Normatively, premarital sexual relations are prohibited but weakly sanctioned among the Navaho, and their marriage ceremony is reasonably elaborate. In effect, then, there are two Navaho cultures. One is permissive and does not require marriage ceremony, and the other is strict and requires marriage ceremony. This posed a problem, but since common law marriage can be considered as a deviation from the norm, and since it exists in other cultures as well, the normative aspects of Navaho culture were taken into account.

A similar problem exists for the Ifugao. Among them, commoners need not have any ceremony to start marriage, but four separate ceremonies and gifts to the bride's kin from the groom are required later. In this case, the ceremonies are not contiguous to marriage in time, and the experience derived from the ceremonies may not have the same impact as in the situation in which they are conducted at the time of marriage. In this sense, the Ifugao, as in the case of the Navaho, have two subcultures. Here again, the normative aspects of the culture were taken into account.

For the testing of the significance of correlation, Yates's "correction for continuity" formula was used for calculating X^2 .

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the finding. This is significant at the .025 level by the X^2 test ($X^2 = 3.87$; $P < .025$, one-tailed). A significant correlation exists between the elaboration of marriage ceremony and the norms of premarital sexual behaviour for females, and Hypothesis 1 has been supported.

DEVIANT CASES

According to the assumption underlying Hypothesis 1, marriage ceremony is elaborate in societies in which the norms of premarital sexual behaviour for females are strict because an

TABLE I. — *Relationship between the norms of premarital sexual behaviour for females and the elaboration of marriage ceremony.*

		Norms of premarital sexual behaviour for females		
		Permissive	Strict	
Marriage ceremony:	Trukese	Andamanese	Aleut	
	Kapauku	Tarahumana	Northern Pomo	
	Mataco	Iroquois	Omaha	
	Simple	Bororo	Trobrianders	Chippewa
	or none	Toda	Tallensi	Rwala
	Chukchee	Mundurucu		
	Masai	Tiv	Somali	Cuna
	Ifugao	Aymara	Koreans	Wolof
	Ila		Iban	Zazzagawa
Reasonably	Fang		Tlingit	Jivaro
elaborate	Lapps		Navaho	Ahaggaren
or	Lau		Bhil	Macassarese
elaborate	Tikopia		Yahgan	Serbs
	Nama		Ganda	Kurd
	Yakut		Ashanti	Annamese
	Thonga		Amhara	Malays
	Lepcha		Irish	Cheyenne

$$X^2 = 3.87; P < .025, \text{ one-tailed.}$$

elaborate marriage ceremony helps sexual adjustment after marriage. This does not mean that in those societies in which the premarital sexual norms are permissive, marriage ceremony is necessarily absent or very simple because an elaborate marriage ceremony in such a society is not detrimental to sexual adjustment. This implies that deviant cases are less likely to be found among the strict societies, and indeed that is the case. Among the

strict societies, 81% of them fall in the expected category, but only 48% of the permissive societies fall in the expected category.

An examination of the strict societies having no or a very simple marriage ceremony is instructive. Among the Chippewa, premarital sex relations are prohibited and strongly sanctioned. Yet common law marriage is practiced. In reality, then, this culture should be seen as a more permissive one than the data suggest. This at least implies that the Chippewa are not truly incompatible with Hypothesis 1. Among the Northern Pomo, often a man stays with a woman several nights before he decides to marry her. The ethnographic description is not clear whether or not this is the same as a trial marriage, however. In the case of the Rwala, there is no feast or dance, and often even the relatives of either the bride or the groom do not know that there has been a wedding. Furthermore, neither of the engaged couple needs to be present when a camel is sacrificed as part of the marriage ceremony. But interestingly enough, a procession to the groom's tent is made by the bride and her female friends with songs and shouts. This may or may not suggest the existence of more elaborate ceremony in the past. In the case of the Aleut, although no formal ceremony is conducted, a feast and an entertainment are held in connection with a marriage.

OTHER POSSIBILITIES

In addition to the norms of premarital sexual behaviour, there are other factors which can be seen in connection with the extent of the elaboration of marriage ceremony. At least three such factors may be recognized. First, it is conceivable that if one is a member of an exogamous group and is required to leave one's original group at marriage, the change in the social environment is likely to be greater as compared with the situation in which marriage is endogamous. This implies that in exogamous societies, marriage ceremony is more elaborate than in endogamous societies. This "exogamy hypothesis" was tested on the basis of the data from Column 19 of *Ethnographic Atlas* (Murdock 1967). The 52 sample cultures were divided into two categories in terms of these data. The cultures belonging to Categories D and S were combined and considered as endogamous, and the cultures

belonging to Categories C, E, and T were also combined and considered as exogamous. There were 18 cultures belonging to Category A (agamous communities) and they were excluded from the sample. The result was in the expected direction but this was statistically insignificant ($X^2 = 1.68$; $P < .10$, one-tailed).

Second, there is what might be called the "lineage hypothesis". In a unilineal society, the lineage of either husband or wife is not taken into account, and this implies that an individual who loses his or her lineage after marriage experiences a more significant change in the social environment after marriage, as compared with the situation in an ambilineal, bilateral, or double descent society. Therefore, more elaborate marriage ceremony is conceivable in unilineal societies to deal with this change. Column 24 of *Ethnographic Atlas* was used in order to test this hypothesis, involving the same 52 cultures. The cultures belonging to Categories A, B, K, Q, R, and S were combined and considered as ambilineal or bilateral, and the cultures of Category O were considered as unilineal. Afterwards, these cultures were checked in regard to the possibility of double descent on the basis of the data of Columns 20 and 22. Three cultures (Toda, Wolof, and Ashanti) were of this type and they were removed from the unilineal category and transferred to the other category. The result shows there is no significant correlation between unilineal descent and the elaboration of marriage ceremony ($X^2 = .03$; $P < .45$, one-tailed).

Third, it is possible to think that marriage ceremony might be a means to prevent divorce. If one goes through an elaborate marriage ceremony, one may possibly realize the importance and seriousness of marriage, and accordingly, one may not think of divorce easily. In order to test this hypothesis, 62 cultures included in a study of divorce by Ackerman (1963) were used. Twenty two of the author's 52 cultures were also included in Ackerman's sample, and they were examined by means of Finney's table for the Fisher's Exact Test (Finney 1948). The result shows there is no correlation between the rates of divorce and the elaboration of marriage ceremony.

Thus, if Hypothesis 1 is compared with these three other hypotheses, it appears that the norms of premarital sexual

behaviour is far more closely correlated with the extent of the elaboration of marriage ceremony among the sample cultures studied. This does not necessarily mean that one is the direct result of the other. The existence of many deviant cases, especially the permissive societies having elaborate ceremonies is against such a simplistic interpretation. Nevertheless, in view of this finding, it is reasonable to think that at least one important function of elaborate marriage ceremony in strict societies is to help an individual being married to adjust to a new life in which the exactly opposite sexual behaviour is expected. This reasoning automatically entails the problem of "manifest" and "latent" functions (Merton 1957:60ff.) as well as that of "emic" and "etic" (see, e.g., Harris 1968:Chap. 20). Whatever the insiders' knowledge of the function of sexual adjustment, judging from the significant statistical correlation between marriage ceremony and the norms of premarital sexual behaviour, this function appears to be a conceivable one.

In addition to these four factors, namely (1) prohibition of premarital sexual behaviour, (2) exogamy, (3) unilineal descent, and (4) prevention of divorce, two situational factors may be mentioned. By nature, these factors deal with certain specific situations and they may not be applicable to most societies. For this reason, it is not proper to examine them by means of a statistical test and to evaluate their validity.

First, it is possible to think of marriage ceremony as a means to deal with a significant status change. According to Nicolaisen (1963:475), this interpretation is applicable to the case of the Ahaggaren. In this society, cross-cousin marriage is practiced, and man and his future wife maintain a joking relationship until marriage. But at marriage, this relationship must be terminated and wife must show great respect for husband. Nicolaisen says (1963:475): "One of the functions of the wedding ceremony is change of the free behaviour between partners into a respect relation". Furthermore, a husband and wife enter into many in-law relationships as a result of marriage. New joking relations must be established, and at the same time, they must have an avoidance relation with their true and classificatory parents-in-law (Nicolaisen 1963:475).

Second, it may be possible that an elaborate marriage ceremony is given to the conformable girl who has remained chaste until marriage. At least one society is suggestive in this regard. Among the Wolof, if the bride turns out to be a virgin, more festivities are added, and she can demand anything as a reward. This explanation is also compatible with the fact that in societies in which a virginity test is required on the wedding night, marriage ceremony tends to be very elaborate.

CONCLUSION

It should be stated clearly that, by nature, marriage is the basis of an important social institution called the family, which is closely related to the other institutions of society. For this reason, it is not desirable to try to explain the function of marriage ceremony by means of one or two factors deterministically. However, it is also possible to say that the meaning of marriage and marriage ceremony can be seen in terms of the self's point of view as well. In this paper, the emphasis is on the way the self experiences its social environment. If marriage ceremony is seen as a rite of passage, it is possible to focus our attention on the change the self experiences after marriage. The results of this study seem to suggest that at least one function of marriage ceremony is to help the individual in a sexually strict society to adjust to a new life in which a drastically different form of behaviour is expected and required.

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