

"And here is *our* father-in-law and mother-in-law," he said, introducing me to an elderly smiling couple. "And here is our brother-in-law," pointing out a handsome young man whistling a spear. "And here is *our* wife, Hwan//a," said my *!kun/a*, presenting me to an absolutely stunning woman in her late thirties with almond eyes and a disconcertingly direct gaze. I noted that her name, "Hwan//a," was the same as that of my "mother." This put us into an ambiguous situation, intimate yet respectful at the same time.

"And here are our children," /Tontah continued, pointing out first a fourteen-year-old girl as striking as her mother, then an eight-year-old girl and a five-year-old boy.

Wanting to play my role as namesake to the hilt, I sat down to talk and said to the eight-year-old, "Daughter, I am thirsty, give me water to drink." In a twinkling an ostrich egg canteen was produced and a cup of passable water poured. Refreshed, I spent the afternoon talking with /Tontah about the other members of his large camp—actually three semicontiguous camps of over 100 people—and how we were related to them. At the end of our talk my *!kun/a* made a comment on Ju/'hoan kinship that has stuck in my mind:

"If your name is /Tontah," he said, "all /Tontahs are your *!kun/as*. All who /Tontahs birthed are your children. All who birthed /Tontahs are your parents, and all who married /Tontahs are your wives."

Which is more important to the Ju/'hoansi, I wondered, the genealogical tie or the name relationship? It is difficult to answer this question, but one line of evidence may be useful. I was both given a name relationship and adopted into a Ju/'hoan family. Most of the other anthropologists and other scientists who have worked with the Ju—about a dozen in number—have only been given namesakes, and that alone, the Ju feel, is more than sufficient to plunge them into the kinship network. The strength of the name relationship and of the principle of kinship in general is illustrated by the experience of a British film crew from the BBC. Within an hour of arrival at Dobe in July 1980, the entire party had been given Ju/'hoan names and had been "adopted" by their namesakes, who proceeded to call them by their Ju/'hoan names for the rest of their stay and who never even bothered to find out what their English names were.

6 / Marriage and Sexuality

Hwan//a, a handsome young woman of 18, had just given birth to a beautiful baby after an affair with a young Herero man. The man would not marry Hwan//a, nor did Hwan//a's parents want him to. They wanted her to marry a Ju/'hoan, but who would take her now that she was a mother of another man's child? In 1964 the problem of "illegitimate" children was still relatively rare, since most girls were married before or soon after *menarche* (first menses).

Several years before, a Ju/'hoan named Bo had approached Hwan//a's parents for her hand in marriage, but her father refused, having another suitor in mind. But when Hwan//a's affair with the Herero boy started, these other negotiations were dropped.

Three days after the baby was born, Bo's mother, Karu, and her husband !Xam, came from a village 12 miles away to visit Hwan//a's parents with an interesting proposition.

"We want to ask you for Hwan//a for our son Bo," said Karu.

Hwan//a's father refused, saying, "My daughter was spoiled by the Herero. If you take her, you will get into arguments with her about the child. And I fear that you will not take care of the child properly because it is born Herero, not Ju/'hoan."

"We are not worried about that," Karu replied. "We want to take both the mother and the child, and we will take care of them just as well as you would yourself."

After further discussion and exchange of gifts, Hwan//a's parents agreed, and Hwan//a herself agreed, and she and her new baby accompanied Karu and !Xam back to their village. A new marriage was consummated and a new alliance forged between the two villages.

The marriage of Hwan//a and Bo illustrates several themes of Ju/'hoan marriage: the arrangements between the parents, the giving of gifts, and the generally flexible and humane attitude towards sexual "indiscretion." The "unwed" mother Hwan//a was not stigmatized or cast out but instead welcomed with her child into the boy's family, even though he was not the father.

However, in other respects the case above is not typical of the way Ju do things. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the changing patterns of Ju/'hoan marriage and sexuality, and to show the central role each plays in Ju/'hoan politics and culture.

THE ARRANGEMENT OF MARRIAGES

Traditionally, the search for a marriage partner for a girl or boy usually begins soon after a child is born. All first marriages are arranged by the parents and may

volve a decade or more of gift exchange before the children are actually wed. Typically, a boy's mother would approach a girl's mother and propose a marriage. The girl's side was agreeable, the betrothal would be sealed with the giving of *kamasi*—a kind of gift specifically exchanged between parents of prospective brides and grooms.

Girls or boys are strictly constrained in who they may or may not marry. In making a suitable spouse parents must pay particular attention to the kinship and name relations of the prospects. There are both primary and secondary prohibitions. In addition to obvious incest taboos against marrying a father, brother, uncle, or nephew, a girl may not marry a first or second cousin.¹ Additionally, she may not marry a boy with her father's name or her brother's name, and a boy in turn may not marry someone with his mother's or sister's name. Secondary prohibitions refer to anyone standing in an avoidance kinship relation to one, including the kin terms, *tsu*, *tsuma*, // *ga*, // *gama*, // *ko*, *tsin*, and so on (see chapter 5).

The result is that when a boy's and a girl's prohibitions are all put together, up three-quarters of all potential spouses may be excluded by reason of real kin ties and name relations. In practice, parents of girls tend to be very picky about who their daughters marry, and if a young man is unsuitable for any reason, a kin or name prohibition can always be found to justify it.

A case in point is Tin'lay, a beautiful pubescent girl who was still unbetrothed in 1969 at the ripe old age of 15. When I presented her mother /Tasa with a list of eligible young men of suitable age, she cordially but firmly vetoed each one in turn. "What about Kau?" I asked.

"No, he's her *tsu*; he has the same name as her father."

"What about Bo?"

"No, he is my // *gama*'s child! We are too closely related."

"What about Kashe?"

"No, he has the same name as Tin'lay's brother. I won't have my 'child' as an -law."

"What about Dam?"

"No, my own sister N'uhka birthed him."

"What about /Gau?"

"Isn't he betrothed to //Kushe?"

"What about Tsaa?" (He was married to Tin'lay's older sister N'uhka.)

"No, I refuse /*gwa* [plural marriage]. N'uhka must be the only one!"

In /Tasa's eyes no one would do for Tin'lay, and several years passed before she was finally married to one Samk'au, a man whose name relation to Tin'lay was one of the joking variety.

In the Ju/'hoan mother's view of things, an ideal son-in-law is an unrelated or distantly related man whose name relation to the girl is /*kun/a* (old name), the most ordinal of joking relations. Whenever possible the husband is drawn from this pool of fictive kin, though other joking kin are also eligible.

¹The prohibition of cousins as spouses is a highly unusual aspect of !Kung marriages. Foraging peoples throughout the world actually *prefer* or *prescribe* a cousin as a spouse.



A young woman nearing the age of puberty and marriage.

Besides the proper kinship-name connection, the parents of a girl look for several other qualities in a son-in-law. He should be a good hunter, he should *not* have a reputation as a fighter, and he should come from a congenial family of people who like to do *hxaro*, the Ju/'hoan form of traditional exchange. The last criterion is tested before the marriage as the parents of the prospective bride and groom exchange a series of *kamasi* gifts to reinforce their relationship. If either side does not keep up the gift exchange, the deal may be called off and a new betrothal sought.

The first two criteria can only be satisfied by close observation of the young man for an extended period. Thus the preferred form of postmarital residence is uxori-local—the groom comes to live with the bride's family for a period of years and to hunt for them. Only after several children are born can he take his wife and family back to his own people. Frequently, after 8 to 10 years of bride service, the couple elects to stay with the wife's people. Hwan//a, in the case study at the start of the chapter, made the unusual move of going directly to her husband's family.

Traditionally, girls were married at ages 12 to 16, boys at 18 to 25. In certain regions such as southern Nyae Nyae, according to informants, the girls' age at marriage was even younger: 10, 9, or even 8 years of age! When combined with the practice of long nursing and late weaning, one might see the amazing situation, in the words of one informant, of "a girl going from her mother's breast to her husband's bed in one day." However sexual consummation of the marriage would be delayed for a number of years after the actual ceremony.

The marked age difference between spouses was another important reason for bride service: a girl of 12 or 14 was simply too young to leave her parents, therefore the husband had to "move in" with his in-laws.

By the 1960s and 1970s, the age of marriage had increased somewhat. Marriage the very young had ceased altogether—the youngest age of marriage we ordered for girls was 14—and the girls tended to marry between the ages of 15 and 18. Boys were further delayed in finding spouses, and their marriage age had increased to 22–30. The greater delay in marriage for boys compared to girls had important social consequence. Because the husband was 7 to 15 years older at marriage than his wife, this had the effect of giving him a disproportionate influence over the marriage partnership. The wives, however, as we shall see, had ways of evening up the score.

THE MARRIAGE-BY-CAPTURE CEREMONY

The Ju/'hoansi marriage ceremony involves the mock forcible carrying of the bride from her parents' hut to a specially built marriage hut, and the anointing of bride and groom with special oils and aromatic powders. Unlike our Western fairy tales in which the couple live happily ever after, !Kung marriages start on a stormy note and continue in that vein for weeks or months after. In fact, the "normal" Ju marriage has many aspects of marriage-by-capture, an ancient and controversial form of marriage in which a groom steals a bride. Today, elements of this ancient custom bear in the marriage rituals of many societies.² In the case of the Ju/'hoansi, the elements of marriage-by-capture present are not entirely ritual in nature. They express real conflict between husband and wife and between parents and children.

These themes are illustrated in this account of a marriage at /Xai/ xai between Kushe, a girl of 16, and a young man named ≠Toma, who was living in the east. The informant is /Twa, the mother of //Kushe.³

When ≠Toma comes from the east we will hold the [marriage] ceremony. First we will build a house for them to live in. Then ≠Toma will go and sit in the hut, while we "mothers" and "grandmothers" (*tunsi*) will go and bring //Kushe to him. She will be crying and refusing and she will be kicking and screaming against us. With some girls it is necessary to carry them bodily to the hut on the back of one of the women. But all the while we are talking to her and saying, "This is the man we have given you to; he is not a stranger; he is our man and a good man; he won't hurt you, and we, your *tunsi*, will be right here with you in the village." When we get her calmed down we will put her inside the hut and all sit around the fire talking. Then as everyone gets sleepy we leave her there with an older girl who will sleep beside her so that //Kushe will be in the middle with her girl friend on one side and her husband on the other.

The next morning we will wash and paint them. First we will wash them with a mixture of *mongongo* oil and the seeds of *tsama* melons. Then we will take both husband and wife and paint them head to toe with red ointment.

Marriage-by-capture was a favorite subject of nineteenth-century anthropologists, who traced its occurrence throughout Europe and the world.

Similar accounts of conflict at marriage are found in L. Marshall (1976), Shostak (1981, 1983), Marshall (1980), and Volkmann (1983).

When I married my husband Tsau [/Twa continued] I didn't fight too hard, but cried a lot when I was taken to sleep in his hut. When the elders went away I listened carefully for their sleeping. Then, when my husband fell asleep and I heard his breathing, I very, very quietly sat up and eased my blanket away from his and stole away and slept by myself out in the bush.

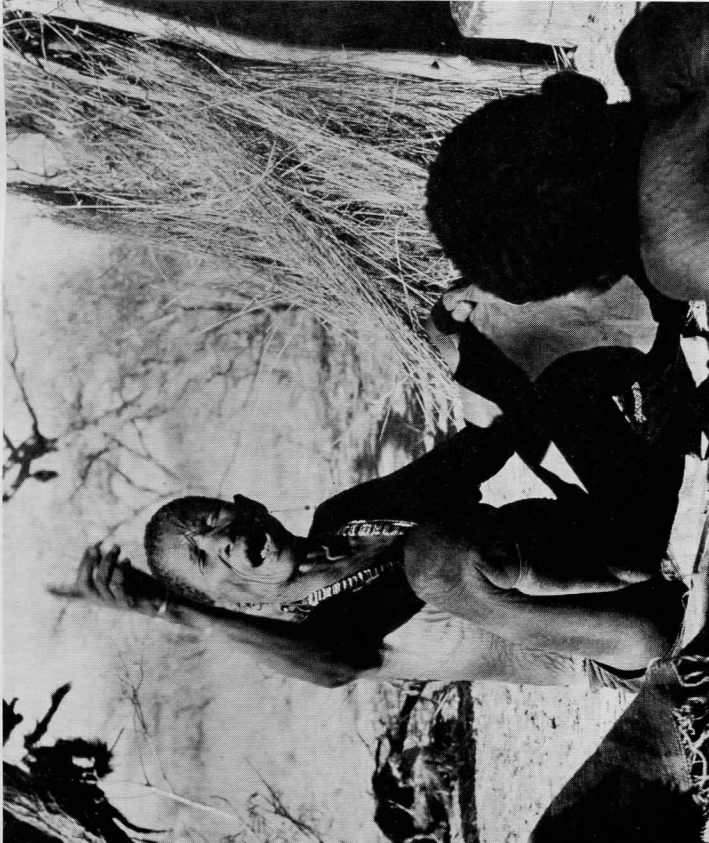
In the morning the people came to Tsau's hut and asked, "Where is your wife?" I looked around and said, "I don't know where my wife has gone off to." Then they picked up my tracks and tracked me to where I was sitting out in the bush. They brought me back to my husband. They told me that this was the man they had given to me and that he wouldn't hurt me.

After that we just lived together all right. At first when we slept under the same blanket our bodies did not touch, but then after a while I slept at his front.

Other girls don't like their husbands and keep struggling away until the husbands give up on them and their parents take them back.

This apparent struggle at the time of marriage is partly customary, but another part of it reveals a genuine underlying conflict. All first marriages are arranged by parents, and the girls have little say in the matter. If the choice is unpopular, the girls will show their displeasure by kicking and screaming, a way of asserting their independent voice in decision making against the alliance of parents and potential husband. If they protest long and hard enough, the marriage will be called off. The fact that close to half of all first marriages fail among the Ju/'hoansi is eloquent testimony to the independence of Ju women from both parents and husbands. In some cases girls have been known to attempt suicide rather than allow a marriage to be consummated. (We know of no successful suicide attempts, and in all cases the marriage was called off.) But even if the protests subside and the marriage takes root, the struggles of the bride during the ceremony serve notice that she is a force to be reckoned with within the marriage and within the family. Another function of the marriage-by-capture motif may have something to do with the relationship between violence and sexual arousal. A prize that is won after a struggle is always more appealing than one that is handed over on a platter. The arousal effect may work equally on both partners. The notion that only males are sexually aggressive may be a projection of our own Western biases on our concept of human nature in general, as will be discussed later.

However, this level of conflict is not sustained indefinitely. After the initial stormy period Ju/'hoan couples usually settle down in a stable long-term relationship that may last 20 or 30 years or more, terminating in the death of one or another spouse. There is ample evidence that Ju men and women develop deep bonds of affection, though it is not the custom of the Ju/'hoansi to openly display it. Successful marriages are marked by joking and ease of interaction between the partners. Only about 10 percent of marriages that last five years or longer end in divorce. When divorce does occur, the initiative comes from the wife far more frequently than from the husband (L. Marshall, 1976:286). Divorces are characterized by a high degree of cordiality, at least compared with Western norms. Whatever the cause of their split, ex-husband and wife may continue to joke and may even live in adjacent huts with their new spouses. (My "mother" //Gumi and my "father" N'eishi lived this way.) Since there is no legal bond or bride price, divorce is



Ntumi, holding forth on the subject of marriage negotiations.

...ple matter subject to mutual consent. The same, for that matter, is true of marriage. The Ju/'hoansi have no system of legal checks and balances apart from their own goodwill and desire to live in harmony. Thus we have seen marriages, especially of older people, occurring without any ceremony at all. A couple simply takes residence together, and the community acknowledges that they are married.

PLURAL MARRIAGE AND REMARRIAGE

In a sample of 131 married men in 1968, 122 (93 percent) were living monogamously, 7 (5 percent) were living polygamously (6 with 2 wives, 1 with 3), and 2 men (2 percent) were living in a polyandrous union, sharing 1 woman. These figures illustrate the point that the overwhelming majority of Ju marriages are monogamous. Although polygamy is allowed and men desire it, it is the wives who in general oppose this form of union. Polyandry is even less common and is considered an irregular union. When it occurs it is usually between older people past childbearing age.

Polygyny (marriage of 1 man to 2 or more women) is uncommon. Of the 7 men in our sample, only 4 were producing children. In 3 others the co-wife was an older woman in a secondary marriage. $\ne$ Toma//gwe of Dobe had a long-standing marriage with //Koka that had produced three grown sons. When



$\ne$ Toma//gwe and his wives N'tai (left) and //Koka (right).

//Koka's younger sister N'tai was widowed at age 60, she became a co-wife, with $\ne$ Toma, of $\ne$ Toma//gwe. An example of a younger plural marriage is N//u, the San constable attached to Headman Isak's tribal court. N//uwe married two sisters. The older woman has borne him five children; the younger sister is infertile. But the three-way marriage has lasted over 20 years. Three of the 7 cases of sororal polygyny, while in 4, the co-wives were unrelated.

When looking at the reasons why some men marry two women and most not, an interesting correlation emerges. All 7 polygynous men are healers (Chapter 8), and 5 of the 7 have reputations as being among the strongest and most effective healers in the Dobe area. The ability to heal is shared by about 45 percent of all Ju men. Therefore, if the ability to heal is a sign of power among Ju/'hoansi, then taking two wives may be one of the very few status symbols associated with it. The wives of the strong healers express pride in their husbands' ability, and they are also among the strongest singers at the all-night healing dances.

Against the express desire of men to take a second wife stands the overwhelming opposition of their first wives. Many married men have started negotiations with prospective parents-in-law only to have their wives threaten to leave them if a second wife enters the union. Sexual jealousy, pure and simple, is the reason given for the wives' objections, and in most cases the husband's plans are dropped. This underlines again the point that women are a force to be reckoned with in the Ju/'hoan society.

Given women's objections to the idea of co-wives, it may come as a surprise that those women who *are* in this type of marriage get along with each other very well! The co-wives, whether sisters or not, strive to maintain harmonious relations, cooperating in food gathering and child care. The three marriage partners sleep under the same blankets, and sexuality is carried on discreetly with each wife in turn. The Ju/'hoan term for polygamy of either the two-wives or two-husbands variety is 'gwah, and the kin term for co-wife is 'gwah di- (literally, co-woman). This term is also used widely among unrelated but friendly women as a term of cordiality. For example, women whose husbands have the same name may call each other 'gwah di-, as do women who were formerly married or betrothed to the same man. The term for co-husband is 'gwah ba (literally, co-father) and a similar rule of cordiality prevails among men married to women of the same name. For example, when my then-wife Nancy Howell was adopted into the name system as her namesake's husband /Twi immediately began calling me his 'gwah ba (co-husband), as did other men married to N'ukhas.

Despite this cordiality, sexual jealousy appears to be strong among the Ju/'hoansi. Women apparently love to joke about co-wifery with other women as long as they don't have to become actual co-wives.

Given the realities of divorce and life expectancies, many Ju/'hoansi, male and female, find themselves without partners in middle or old age. Although some remain unattached—out of choice or necessity—many do remarry, and for those who do, these second (or third) marriages often prove to be happy and fulfilling. One interesting aspect of marriage in later life is the number of older women who marry younger men—men who are 10, 15, or more years younger than their wives. At /Xai/ xai in the mid-1960s a remarkable 27 percent of all married couples (8 out of 29) had the wife older than the husband. One reason these marriages work so well is that, freed from the tasks of childrearing, middle age tends to be a carefree time of life for Ju/'hoansi women, a topic discussed in Lee (1992b).

//N, a vigorous older woman, was about 55 when she married /Tontah, who was about 30, the same age as her son ≠Toma from a previous marriage. In an interesting twist, the son ≠Toma then married Tin'kay, his stepfather's older sister, who was five years older than ≠Toma. Neither marriage produced children, and no one at /Xai/ xai regarded these arrangements as too out of the ordinary. Since such linked marriages occur in many cultures, I wonder if readers are aware of similar marriages in their own or friends' families?

Of course the age difference between spouses can go in the other direction—with a husband much older than his wife. In 1985, Kumsa, a widower in his sixties, gave his teenage daughter in marriage to another widower about his age. It proved to be a good marriage and when children were born, Kumsa was encouraged to remarry himself, this time to a very young woman in her mid-teens. Nearly everyone regarded this marriage as an excellent one for both partners, except the bride herself, who ended the union after several months.

In most cultures remarriages tend to occur with couples who are closer in age than these examples, but here other problems emerge; for example, the principle of sibling solidarity may come into conflict with the desire to remarry. As we have emphasized, sibling relations are crucial in structuring Ju/'hoansi living groups



N≠isa flanked by her brother Segai (left) and her husband ≠Tomazho.

(pp. 62–66). Adult or elderly siblings constitute the core of most living groups. Siblings are the main alternative to remarriage for widows and widowers is to take up residence with an adult sibling or siblings.

For some it is possible to have the best of *both* worlds and live with both a sibling and a spouse. N≠isa, a twice-divorced 60-year-old at /Xai/ xai, was living happily with her older brother Segai and his wife, until an old friend, ≠Tomazho—a dashing 70-year-old widower, came into her life. When ≠Tomazho—a famous healer—married N≠isa she was faced with a dilemma of leaving her brother's village where she was very comfortable. All ended happily when ≠Tomazho agreed to leave his married daughter's village and move in with his wife and her brother to leave his married daughter's village and move in with his wife and her brother. The photo above (also cover photo) shows N≠isa, flanked by her brother Segai on her right, and her husband ≠Tomazho on her left, all of them beaming and in excellent spirits.

INTERGROUP ALLIANCE AND CONFLICT

In a society like the Ju/'hoansi, with so little property to argue about, sexuality and marriage choices are two of the main foci both of social solidarity and of social conflict. When homicide occurs it is likely to have been triggered by an argument between men over a woman. Because of this, the negotiations over marriage have an undercurrent of danger to them. If a promise is broken, or two men feel they have a legitimate claim to the same woman, a fight may break out, sometimes with fatal results (see Chapter 7).

It is the threat of violence that may account for the fact mentioned earlier that some Ju/'hoan girls were married very young, at age 10, 9, or even younger. A clue given when we note that the area where the girls were married youngest—Nyae Nyae—was also an area that had a high incidence of blood feuds (see Lee, 1979:387). Informants argued that the young age at marriage at Nyae Nyae was due to the desire of parents to have their daughters safely married *before* rivals could make their claims, or before the girl was old enough to have an affair with one man after her parents had betrothed her to another. If a girl was married before she became sexually active, peace could be assured in the community.

Though conflict might erupt over a betrothal, it would be a mistake to exaggerate its importance. After the early stormy period, the great majority of Ju marriages are established without stress, and the couples live in peace and harmony. In fact, marriage is one of the major forms of intergroup alliance among the Ju/'hoansi. The marriage of a young couple creates an important bond between the two families and their camps. The kin terms *n!unba* and *n!untai* refer to child's mother's father and child's spouse's mother respectively. (There are no equivalent terms in English, although there are in many other languages.) The in-laws collectively are known as *n!un k'ausi* (or *twisti*). The *n!un* relationship between affines is very strong among the Ju/'hoansi. If the two families live far apart they will likely exchange visits of a month's duration each year. The *n!un k'ausi* are usually strong partners in the *hxaro* network, exchanging gifts through their children over a period of years or decades. In some cases the entire family of the groom may take up residence with the family of the bride. An example of this was the family of N/ahka, who married /Xashe, ≠Toma//gwe's eldest son at Dobe. After finishing bride service, /Xashe brought his wife back to Dobe to live. In 1963–1965 a large party of her kin came to live with her and her in-laws at Dobe, including her mother, her mother, her married sister with her husband and two children, a married brother and his wife, four more unmarried siblings, her mother's brother, and her maternal grandfather—a total of 14 people (Chapter 5, Figure 5–2).

To understand the true nature of marriage in societies like the Ju/'hoansi, you have to see that marriage alliances form an important part of the system of social security. If one has good relations with in-laws at different waterholes, one will never go hungry. If wild food resources give out in your home territory, you can always go visit your in-laws. This is the secret of why Ju/'hoansi marriages are so important to individual and group survival.

THE "MARRIAGE" OF /TONTAH

In the winter of my first year of fieldwork I was staying in the bush with /Xashe and N/ahka, and with her parents, Kasupe and /Tasa. One evening as we sat around a campfire telling hunting stories, /Xashe turned to me and asked,

“/Tontah, back in your *n!ore*, your parents, are they living or dead?”

“Living,” I replied. “Why do you ask?”

“And your wife and children,” he responded, sidestepping my question, “where they?”

“I have no wife and no children. I'm still too young to marry.”

The people laughed at my response. With my beard and my obvious wealth certainly appeared to them as part of the marriageable age group.

“Well,” /Xashe continued, “who have your parents betrothed you to?”

“No one! The girls have all refused me.” Another stock answer, and good for laugh. “But I do have a girl friend. And one of these days we might marry.” That was true. My good friend Marie Kingston had lived in the Kalahari for several months, and they had met her.

Turning serious, /Xashe said, “/Tontah, a man like you, owning many things can afford many wives, and even if you have a wife in your *n!ore* you should have a wife from this *n!ore*. I, /Xashe, as I am sitting here today, take my daughter //Toka and give her to you.”

The people at the fire loudly indicated their approval of this move, while the subject of this discussion, a perky four-year-old, averted her glance and cuddled in the arms of her mother.

I had heard about the practice of early betrothal among the !Kung, but this was ridiculous!

“But, but,” I stammered, “by the time she is old enough to marry me she will have an old man for a husband.”

“Not so,” replied /Xashe. “She is young now, but it won't be long before she can marry you. Two, three rainy seasons at the most,” he gestured, holding up his fingers, “and you will be together.”

“And think of what it will be like,” said N/ahka, the mother of the “bride” and my potential mother-in-law. “In the morning you are sleeping by your fire and your young wife is up and around drawing water, roasting nuts, and cooking food.” /Xashe and N/ahka pantomimed with gusto. “Then you wake up and stretch, you have a nice cool drink of water and a wash-up, and then your breakfast is ready.” The people nodded and murmured approvingly.

Now N/ahka was really warming to her subject. “Refreshed and well-fed, you are now ready to hunt. You test your arrows and choose the ones to take; you shoulder your quiver and you are off. All day long you criss-cross the country. Then you spy an animal, stalk carefully, and let fly. The animal is hit; you give chase; it's its down; you finish it off with your spear and it's yours. You shoulder the load of meat and stagger home, hot and dusty. Your *tsiu* has a nice cold egg of water waiting for you. You drink and wash up, and then *sha*, and //gxa, and leafy greens are cooked and ready to eat. You drink, you eat, you butcher and cook the meat, and drink and eat again. Around the fire your wife spreads your blankets, and you lie down to a good night's sleep.”

The group was chuckling and clucking in appreciation of our domestic bliss—be. But N/ahka pressed on. “*Mi≠ium*,” she said, using the kin term for son-in-law, “that is how it will be. But first we must teach you how sons-in-law behave. Sons-in-law men hunt for their in-laws, but as you have no quiver there are other ways. You can give us things: clothes, blankets, shoes, beads, food, sugar, tea. All this will show us that you are a serious suitor.”

The group was particularly pleased with this last bit. They knew that *kamadi*—the gifts that flow between prospective in-laws, circulate widely in the recipient

village, and so all stood to benefit from having me as a son-in-law.

It was my turn to speak. "Mi≠tum," I said to /Xashe, "and *mil totsu*," addressing N/ahka, "your words make my heart feel glad. I like you and I would like to be your ≠um. But I don't know what my family would say. I will write them and send out. In the meantime, let us do *kamasi*."

This answer seemed to satisfy people. N/ahka, beaming, turned to her daughter and said, "//Koka, greet your husband."

While her age-mates giggled, //Koka stared sullenly and stuck her tongue out at me.

SEXUALITY

The learning of sexual behavior begins for Ju children at an early age. Parents and young children sleep under the same blanket, and parental sex is carried on discreetly while the children sleep. Older children run naked through the village until they are seven or eight, and it is only when they reach their early teens that they are fully expected to cover up the genitals.

There is a natural and unconscious attitude toward sex on the part of the /hoansi, and this attitude is imparted to the children. Sexual play is considered a normal part of childhood. N≠tisa, a 50-year-old !Kung woman from !Kangwa, was interviewed in depth by Marjorie Shostak about her life experiences. Here N≠tisa speaks about her first experiences of sex:

When a child sleeps beside his mother, in front, and his father sleeps behind and makes love to her, the child watches. Perhaps this is the way the child learns. Because as his father lies with his mother, the child watches. The child is still senseless, is without intelligence, and he just watches.

Then, when he and the other children are playing, if he is a little boy, he takes his younger sister and pretends to have sex with her. And as he grows, he lives in the bush and continues to play, now with other children, and they have sex with each other and play and play and play. They take food from the village and go back to the bush and continue their games. That's the way they grow up. . . .

Some days I refused and remained in the village and just stayed with mother. Some days I went with them. Sometimes I refused to play, other times I agreed. The little boys entered the play huts where we were playing and then they lay down with us. My boyfriend came to see me and we lived like that and played. We would lie down and they would have sex with us.

/Ti!kay taught it to me, and because of that I liked him. I really liked him! When we played, the other children said I should play with someone else, but I refused. I wanted /Ti!kay only. I said, "Me, I won't take a horrible man."

They teased /Ti!kay. "Hey . . . /Ti!kay . . . you are the only one N≠tisa likes. She refuses everyone else."

He taught me about men. We played and played, and he grabbed me, and we played and played. Some days we built little huts, and he took me. We played every day. I used to think, "What is this thing that is so good? How come it is so good and I used to refuse it? The other children knew about it, and I had no sense. Now I know when you are a child, this is something you do. You teach it to yourself. (Shostak, 1976:262-263)

From this account it will be clear that the concept of virginity can have no meaning in the !Kung context. Most boys and girls will have had some experience of sexual intercourse by age 15. It is curious, therefore, that girls express so much fear and resistance toward their husbands at the time of marriage. As we noted pages 82-84, Ju girls struggle to avoid sexual intercourse with their husbands weeks or months after the marriage. N≠tisa, too, resisted strenuously the advance of her husband, /Xashe, even tying a branch between her legs with leather to prevent her husband's penetration (Shostak, 1976:272-73). Finally, after many fruitful struggles, N≠tisa's attitude began to change:

We lived and lived and soon I started to like him. After that I was a grown person and said to myself, "Yes, without a doubt a man sleeps with you. I thought maybe he didn't."

We lived on, and then I loved him and he loved me, and I kept on loving him. When he wanted me I didn't refuse, and he slept with me. I thought, "Why have I been so concerned about my genitals? They are after all not so important. So why was I refusing them?"

I thought that and gave myself to him and gave and gave. I no longer refused. I lay with one another, and my breasts had grown very large. I had become a woman. (Shostak, 1976:274-75)

Marital sex after the excitement of the children's play groups is of necessity rather restrained. The presence of young children and the lack of privacy further inhibit sexual expression. The preferred position for intercourse is man-behind-woman-in-front, with the two lying on their sides as they face the sleeping fire.

Younger couples may vary this by going out gathering together and making love in daylight out in the *t'si*. Except for young infants, children are left behind on the expeditions. Interviews with informants suggested that the Ju/'hoansi use a variety of sexual positions, including male superior, female superior, front and rear entry. The goal of sex for both partners is orgasm, and it is clear from informants that Ju/'hoansi have a clear conception of female orgasm. Several women said they regularly experienced *tain*, the Ju word for orgasm, the same word used to describe the indescribably delicious taste of wild honey.

A number of forms of sexual behavior that are common in our society are rare or absent among the Ju/'hoansi: oral and anal sex, coitus interruptus, bondage, sado-masochistic practices do not appear to be part of the Ju/'hoan repertoire. Similarly, rape seems to be extremely uncommon among the Ju/'hoansi (Marshall, 1976:279).

Homosexuality is not common, but both gay and lesbian forms do occur. N≠tisa described a number of same-sex sexual experiences with childhood playmates (Shostak, 1983:120). A few adult men and women have experimented with same-sex sexual partners, with male homosexuality being slightly the more common. Of the two women and six men reported to have had homosexual experiences all were married, indicating that all were bisexual. Ju/'hoan nonparticipants in the activities expressed attitudes of curiosity and bemusement toward them rather than embarrassment or hostility.

The question of marital fidelity and extramarital affairs is one that has fascinated several observers, but the data are contradictory. In many Ju marriages the partners are strictly faithful to one another, while in a large minority there

evidence of extramarital affairs. For example, at one waterhole with about 50 married couples between the ages of 20 and 50, we recorded 16 couples in which one or another was having an affair. Both husbands and wives take lovers; there is no double standard among the Ju/'hoansi. In confiding to Marjorie Shostak (1981, 1983), Ju women spoke warmly of their lovers and the rare and precious moments they spent with them. Both partners, however, had to be discreet. If an outraged husband or wife discovered the liaison, a major fight could break out. Women, if anything, expressed more sexual jealousy than men, and if they caught wind of an affair, they have been known to attack their rivals or their husbands, or both.

MALE AND FEMALE AMONG THE !KUNG

We have looked at marriage and sexuality and have found that they are sources of strength and cohesion in Ju/'hoan society, as well as sources of conflict, disharmony, and stress. On balance, though, the cohesive side predominates: male-female relations are not riven with stress and dissension, and most Ju/'hoansi would be considered (by our standards at least) to be blessed with happy marriages and good sex lives. Now we have to ask the question, is this blessing achieved at the expense of women, who are subordinated to their husbands' interests? Or, conversely, is it the men who are subordinate to the interests of women? Let us review the evidence. Arranged marriages do put a young woman at a disadvantage as her parents and her husband make arrangements about her future. But the young woman can make her needs known by vetoing the marriage, an option not offered women in many tribal and peasant societies. During marriage both men and women work around the "home," with the men doing more subsistence work and tool-making and women doing more housework and child care. No evidence of exploitation here.

The marriage ceremony does act out a ritual of marriage-by-capture and, as we noted, it conceals a real source of generational and gender conflict beneath the surface. However, the many forms of sexual oppression that women experience in other societies, such as rape, wife battering, purdah, enforced chastity, and sexual double standards are absent in Ju/'hoan society. In their sexual life both men and women appear to enjoy sex and to seek and expect to achieve orgasm, and both may seek lovers outside a primary relationship. And both men and women experience sexual jealousy and may act out their anger on spouses or rivals. The evidence on balance supports neither of the two alternatives mentioned above. Rather, we see a picture of relative equality between the sexes, with no one having the upper hand. There is no support in the Ju/'hoansi data for a view of women in "the state of nature" as oppressed or dominated by men or as subject to sexual exploitation at the hands of males.

Lee, Richard The Dobe Ju/'hoansi 2nd ed
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1993

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