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Stories of the Vision Quest Among Dunne-za Women

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Introduction

Anthropology has always been bound in its view of life in other societies by the taken-for-granted assumptions that organize the lives of anthropologists themselves within their own society. Our descriptions inevitably reflect what we have not thought to question in our own lives as much as the apparently exotic behavior of the people we study. As our own culture changes from year to year and generation to generation, we are surprised to discover the obvious in other cultures that had been invisible to those who preceded us within our own tradition. Even though ethnographic facts may remain the same, their meaning changes as we ourselves change. Meaning is a creature of context and hence inevitably reflexive. We see in other cultures only what is meaningful within the context of our own concerns. Anthropology, like history, must be re-written by the intelligence of each new generation. With luck, anthropology's encounters with other lives may even contribute to the direction of change.

Anthropology's view of women in other societies has been particularly bound by our own assumptions about the relative positions of men and women. The implicit bias toward recognizing and valuing the activities of men over those of women that has permeated a good deal of anthropological writing by both men and women within the profession is now coming starkly into focus because of the concern and activism of women in our own society. Suddenly, we begin to see the sexism cryptically coded into the language and assumptions we took for granted in the writing of a previous generation. How could we have accepted without question kinship studies that with little ethnographic basis modeled kinship systems as the exchange of women between groups of men? "The basis of human exchange, and hence one basis of symbolic thought and the beginning of culture, lies in the uniquely human phenomenon that a man is able to establish relationship with another man by means of an exchange of women" (Leach 1970 44). How could we have acceded to the idea of "man the hunter" to describe hunting and gathering societies when our own data showed that most of the food in tropical hunting and gathering societies was being brought in by groups of foraging women? (Lee 1980). How could we have taken uncritically interpretations of menstrual taboos as being based on women's pollution of the male spiritual realm or accepted a description of the assertiveness of old women in other societies as "screaming old women yelling obscenities at everybody," "hags" and "crones" (Leacock 1978)?

Of course, our own society's particular form of sexism that made it difficult for anthropologists to report accurately on the activities of women in other societies in no way precludes the existence of institutions that diminish the status of women in other societies. Our own bias against taking the activities of women as seriously as we take those of men surely brings into question our unquestioned attribution of a similar disadvantage to women in the societies we study. In light of the current context that nourishes our world of meaning, we must take another look at generalizations taken for granted in previous interpretations of women's lives in other times and places. Any change in our thinking about ourselves necessitates a rethinking of our assumptions about other people.

Even works by or about women cannot realistically be expected to transcend the assumptions prevalent at the time they were written. Eleanor Leacock makes this point forcefully in her critique of *The Ojibwa Woman* by Ruth Landes (Leacock 1978 251). Leacock points out that while Landes offers "full and rich documentation of women's activities and interests," she has "undermined her own contribution to the understanding of sex roles in a hunting society through the downgrading of women that is built into unexamined and ethnocentric phraseology" (Leacock 1978 251). We find ourselves now in a period of transformation as old assumptions about sex roles are being revised or replaced. Concomitant with this transformation, a new anthropology of women is taking shape (Rapp 1979). The present paper presents information relevant to the role of native women in North America.

Looking back over my own work on the Beaver Indians or Dunne-za of northeastern British Columbia published over the past 14 years, I notice a similar unexamined and ethnocentric bias in my presentation of data, despite having had the benefit of a distinguished and meticulous woman scholar, Cora DuBois, as my thesis advisor. Some of the differences I note between early and later work have to do with the sexist bias implicit in the use of male pronouns when referring to men and women, a practice that was in keeping with accepted stylistic norms of the time. Other differences, however, reflect more profound assumptions about the primacy of men in the political and spiritual life of the people which I study.

In a paper published in 1971, "Beaver Dreaming and Singing," I acknowledged that, "being a male myself, my account will undoubtedly show a male bias and be more from the perspective of a boy growing up in Beaverland than that of a girl. Crossing cultural gaps seems enough of a task at the moment without also crossing sexual ones. My neglect of women in this account does not imply that Beaver culture neglects women." I then went on to say that "for every camp there is a camp area where cooking, hide-working and other domestic activities take place, and a bush area that is exclusive to the hunters. The camp is associated with women and family life and the bush with men and the animals they mysteriously go out to hunt and miraculously bring back to be transformed into food by the women" (Ridington 1971 120).

While there is some ethnographic basis for my generalizations about male and female roles, the interpretation implicit in my description requires rethinking in light of the changes which I and others among us have experienced with respect to our assumptions about the place of women in our own society and in the societies we study as anthropologists. In 1971, I lumped cooking, hide-working and other domestic activities as being symbolically opposed to hunting and travel in the bush. I neglected to point out that wood-working and weapon making, customarily but not exclusively the work of men, were also domestic activities that took place in camp. My description reflected the bias of my own cultural experience that took it for granted that women "normally" do cooking, sewing and

household work and men "normally" go outside the home in order to "bring home the bacon."

More profoundly, my description did not take into account information about the competence of women in hunting and trail-finding activities within the bush realm. In going through my field notes and texts, I found there were approximately equal numbers of references to the vision quests of men and women. Stories about pre-reservation life indicated that women were expected to know the bush and were trained through childhood vision quests. I would now argue that it is impossible to cross cultural gaps without also attempting to cross sexual ones. The following is an account of the vision quest among Dunne-za women as I have been able to understand it from information generously made available to me by the Dunne-za during the course of my field work among them.

The Vision Quest In Dunne-za Life

The vision quest and guardian spirit complex is widespread among North American native people (Benedict 1923). Among many of the plateau tribes where the vision quest was "perhaps most highly developed" according to Driver, both boys and girls were expected to have vision quest experiences (Driver 1961 471). The Dunne-za are like the plateau tribes to the south of them in the importance they attach to the vision quest as well as in the Prophet Dance they share with plateau people (Ridington 1978; Spier 1935).

My own work among the Dunne-za began in 1964 although I first came to know them during the summer of 1959. Because of its importance to them, the Dunne-za do not speak lightly of their vision quest experiences. Indeed, only old people are at liberty to discuss their personal experiences openly. One is expected to learn a person's medicine powers by observation of his or her actions (Ridington 1976). At least among younger people, direct disclosure of a vision quest encounter will either nullify the power or turn it against the person. Even old people refer to their powers only in the symbolically coded form of stories or actions that dramatize stories of the medicine animals that lived in mythic times (Ridington 1979).

Traditionally, every child was sent out into the bush alone to gain power from one of the medicine animals. For each power there was a story about how the culture hero, Saya, who circles the world like the sun and moon, transformed person-eating giant animals into the forms that are common today. Each medicine animal may convey a certain power to those who encountered the animal during their vision quest. Along with the animal's power there were also taboos relating to the events in the story about Saya and the medicine animal. These taboos prohibited other people from doing certain things in the presence of someone whose power was known. They also prohibited the person from eating certain foods. As a person grew into the powers first encountered in her or his vision quest, she or he came in effect to live within the circle of a ritually ordered space. Around such a person, the stories of events in mythic time were real and current. The incommunicable moment of transformation experienced in the solitary vision quest became a message to others as it worked itself out during the course of a person's life. What was once compressed into the moment of subjective experience became intersubjective. What was once a single mind and body alone in the vastness of the boreal forest, became knowledge that nourished all the people.

For Dunne-za knowledge is power. In English, they describe a person with power as someone who "know little bit something." Dunne-za means "our people." To be one of our people is to "know something." Both men and women were imprinted with the knowledge of their medicines by the vision quests they experienced as children. Both men and women knew how to take care of themselves in the bush alone. Both

men and women took part in the domestic life of the camp.

Just as our own culture classifies kin differently from the categories used by the Dunne-za, our simple dichotomy between men and women does not represent Dunne-za categories for male-female relations accurately. For us, the gender contrast is primary, while for the Dunne-za the contrast between old and young is equally important. Terminologically, old people have a special status. An old man is kwolan, and old woman, dziuan. In addition, young people before the age of puberty are considered yet another kind of person as are infants before the age of reason. Women of childbearing age were subject to elaborate ritualization of their lives during the time of menstruation and underwent an extensive ceremonially embellished time of instruction by older women during menarche. Women past the time of menopause were free to move according to their personal inclination. During a woman's childbearing years, the difference between her life and that of a man was symbolically elaborated. After this time in her life, there was a period of convergence until as old people, men and women were seen as very much alike. The symmetry of this convergence was reinforced by a cross generation marriage preference that applied equally to men and women. Young women usually married older men and young men, older women whose early husbands were no longer on the scene.

Old people and the young people were united by the mystery of the vision quest. Men and women were equally united in their common experience of this central sacrament. The following are two descriptions of transformative encounters of Dunne-za women when they were young. Both women, now dead, were well known to me in their later years. Sitama's story was told to me by one of her sons. Nachi told her story in her language in the presence of her grandchildren. I could not follow her words at the time but obtained a translation of the tape recording later. Sitama means "child's mother"—Nachi means "big."

Sitama's story

Peter told me about his mother's vision quest during a conversation we had about medicine powers and the vision quest in general. I asked him if children forgot how to speak to human beings after they had stayed with an animal in the bush. He replied as follows:

> Yes, they look strange. When you see your people you start to run away. Even Mom was like that that time. Long time ago, she told us about that time. She said she travelled 60 miles I think. She said that the man, those people who raised her, left an axe that far away just on purpose and told her to get it. They told her to get the axe. So Mom starts travelling in the wintertime I guess. She said, "There was a wolf travelling ahead of me. I keep following that wolf, just keep following. Then there were some other hunters, some people just camping out hunting. They were about that far away. As soon as I came close to that place where their camp was, maybe about a mile, there was a trail, the bottom trail or something came close to that place and that wolf walked on, you know, just a shadow, and he was kind of like saying things." It was old wolf tracks she saw but she saw the shadow of the wolf in them. "That thing is still going on ahead of me so I keep on going too. As soon as I saw the fire of that hunting camp," she said, "I can't go near it." But those hunters spotted her. She said, "That one woman in the camp spotted me and started toward me and I ran away. I was knocked out for two days." I think that animal kind of made her mad. And that one old man he started dreaming and for two days she didn't know anything, just knocked out. After two days that old man covered her with his coat and she went to

sleep. Next morning she woke up and the old man gave her water and she was allright. If those people hadn't camped there she would have caught up with the wolf and they would have stayed together in real life.

The story of Sitama's vision quest encounter with the power of wolf illustrates general features of the vision quest and indicates that girls were given the same opportunity as boys to make spiritual contact with the bush realm. The competence expected of women and men required arduous training. In this case, a girl of perhaps ten or twelve years of age is expected to be able to backtrack a full day's journey from one camp to another. Symbolically, her travel by herself back along the tracks of her people to an empty campsite is like the travel taken by a person's shadow or ghost after death as well as like the monthly travel of the moon from West to East, itself a shadow of the sun's daily progression from East to West. The trail she follows is not just a physical line of tracks. It is a shadow trail back to the time when the giant medicine animals who pursue and consume people are alive and active. She knows the medicine animals from the stories she has heard about them and from the ritualized space around the old people where the events of these stories come close to the surface of everyday reality. She has also heard the medicine songs, power songs, used to restore the well being of a person in distress. Indeed, she may have been brought back by the song of an old person's medicine power from a time when her own life force had become weak and disorganized.

The story about giant wolf tells how the creator was watching the world grow from a tiny germ of substance brought up from the bottom of the primordial water by muskrat, the first shaman. Then (s)he made a wolf and sent it out to measure the world's sufficiency. The first wolf which (s)he made came back with a person's arm in its mouth; (s)he sent it down beneath the earth's surface. (S)he gave the second wolf teeth that were sharp like knives and sent it out into a larger and more sufficient world. The second wolf never returned. From this the creator knew the world was complete. Wolf is an animal who knows many trails.

From her encounter with the shadow trail of wolf when she was a child, Sitama came into possession of this knowledge. As she followed the trail of her people back toward the place where they had camped, she discovered that above the signature of her own tracks in the snow were those of wolf, the trail finder. By these signs, she came into the beginning of an intelligence that would organize her dreaming and waking moments. Throughout her life, Sitama felt her power lay in her knowledge of trails. When she felt threatened by events in the white-man's world her instinct was to leave the reserve and head into the bush. I did not live with her long enough to observe the personal taboos through which people could learn of her medicines but they are likely to have been based on references to the medicine wolf story.

According to Peter's story, she followed the shadow tracks until she came close to where another group of people were camped on a hunting trip. The story simply refers to these people as "some other hunters"; we learn that the group included both men and women. The person who first spotted her was a woman. The one who dreamed for two days and covered her with his medicine coat was an old man. She encountered these people just at the point where the shadow tracks of wolf began to turn down beneath the earth as they did in the creation story. If those people had not made contact with her, Peter said she would have entered the mythic world of the first wolf and been lost to the world of Dunne-za.

Even when Sitama came to live in a house on the small reserve close to the Alaska Highway, she continued to spend as much time as possible camped out in the bush. She was always more at home on the trail than within the enclosure of

four alien walls. Her camps were always well-organized and comfortable; she moved with ease from one place in the bush to another. In addition to her wolf medicine, she must have had other powers that I was not given to learn. The vision quest encounters of a young girl long ago continued to organize the energies of this strong woman.

Nąchi's Story

Nąchi lived in a different community from Sitama but they were sisters according to the Dunne-za system of kinship classification. She was first married as a young woman to her mother's brother whose wife had died. From this older man she learned a wealth of stories, but he was killed when a tree blew down on the tent in which they were sleeping together. Since that time, she has had so many husbands that she told me, half jokingly, she could not remember all their names. Unlike Sitama, who was married only twice, Nąchi outlived a large number of relationships. At the time I knew her she lived with her widowed daughter and teenage granddaughter. Her house was immaculate and she was relatively well off because of the government old age pension she received from "some kind-hearted whiteman."

Nąchi's memory went back to a time before the Dunne-za began to use horses. Her story reflects the pace of life experienced by boreal forest nomads who moved from place to place on foot. Like Sitama, she was trained to move through the bush alone. Like every other Dunne-za, she was expected to be able to take care of herself should the need arise. The bush skills and self-reliance which she and Sitama learned as girls were integrated throughout their lives into the communal responsibilities of band membership. They were trained to take care of themselves in order to contribute to the care of others. Both men and women in traditional Dunne-za society were expected to be providers as well as workers within the camp's enclosure.

Before the introduction of rifles and the fur trade, men and women hunted large game together in communal drives and surrounds. After the introduction of rifles, men began to specialize in solitary big game hunting while women took primary responsibility for small game. Nąchi describes the experience of a girl one day in March around 1903. That experience tells us who the old woman called Nąchi was in 1968. It also tells us something about the quality of life experienced by countless generations of Dunne-za women.

I have chosen to include a long passage from Nąchi's story rather than limit it to the transformative experience of her vision quest itself because the full text reveals much about the normal everyday pace of a woman's life in a nomadic hunting and gathering culture. The easy blend of personal autonomy and collective responsibility comes out beautifully in her memory of a morning when she and her grandmother woke before the other women to gather poplar bark to eat and found themselves participating in a moose hunt. This little vignette from a woman's experience seventy years ago reflects a quality of life that must go back to pre-contact times. In a small way, this event harks back to the time when most of the hunting was done in communal drives and surrounds that involved the co-operation of men and women working together toward a common goal. Such co-operation could only be achieved by assuming that each individual was able to understand the entire enterprise and act intelligently upon this understanding.

Dunne-za training encouraged individual autonomy but provided children with the information they needed to make intelligent decisions. There seems to have been no difference in the value placed on the informed autonomy of men and women. The evidence presented here is in accord with Leacock's statement that,

> the basic principle of egalitarian band society was that people made decisions about the activities for which they were responsible. Consensus was reached within whatever group would be carrying out a collective activity.... With regard to the autonomy of women, nothing in the structure of egalitarian band societies necessitated special deference to men. There were no economic and social liabilities that bound women to be more sensitive to men's needs and feelings than vice versa. This was even true in hunting societies, where women did not furnish a major share of the food (Leacock 1978 249).

This is how Naĉhi described a girl's adventure long ago:

> It used to be we had a hard time. We didn't have horses. We had to pack our stuff on our backs. We would hunt beaver from boats. It was hard. There wasn't much to eat. Sometimes we would eat a little. Sometimes someone would get a moose. We would eat a little and then it would be gone. Then we would move around, move from place to place until fall time. In July and August we would walk from Moberly Lake to Fort St. John to Dawson Creek, all over the places where the big towns are now, making drymeat. That's how far we went for moose. Sometimes we made a round trip from Doig River to Moberly Lake in ten days. That's what my songe (mother's sister; also step-mother) told me. Some people don't believe that we had to pack all our stuff and drymeat on our backs. When my grandfather (Yeklezi, her father's father) was alive he used to tell me about how they had to make four trips back to the places they cached the drymeat. In wintertime too, they had to go back to the cache for the rest of the drymeat. Then they got horses and they could make them pack the drymeat back. That's how we Dunne-za used to live in wintertime. There wasn't any flour or grub. We ate just straight meat. Today, with potatoes and flour and everything you think one moose is lots. You think it will last a month. In those days, one moose wouldn't last long; not one month. We ate only meat. You old buggers like that (jokingly to her grandchildren), don't laugh at me. We used to go hunting in Alberta. We would go hunting for moose. There are really good people down there. You were never stuck for food. They would always feed you. They were really good people. They treat you like a baby. There weren't many Indians (Dunne-za) over there. Mostly halfbreeds (Dishinni meaning Cree Indians). Lots of girls and boys, but not very many Dunne-za. They were good to us. Today you eat well but it used to be that we went starving all the time, all the time, all the time. Today if you don't have meat you can eat bannock. It used to be when we didn't have any meat we didn't have anything to eat. In the fall-time we would bring our drymeat back to Doig River. Somebody tells her, "That's not the kind of stories they (we) want." She says, "What the hell you think I am? That's the only kind of stories I know. My mother didn't raise me; how do you think I was supposed to learn stories." (She was married in her teens to an old man named Appa, her sise, in this case her father's sister's husband. He told her many stories, and through him and her grandfather, Yeklezi, the world of several generations before became real to her. Appa was killed by a windfall when they were asleep together. She was unhurt.)
>
> It used to be there was lots of meat. There are lots of moose still. Why don't you boys go out and hunt instead of just sitting around? I don't like whiteman's food. I don't like it now. I used to have lots of relations. Now I have none. Some Old Peo-

ple have lots of relations still but not me. Sitama is the only relative I have left. Get some soup for me from next door. Some kind-hearted man gives me money; that's why I get groceries from town. (She is referring to her government old age pension.) If it wasn't for that kind-hearted whiteman giving the three of us money (her household consists of herself, her widowed daughter and her granddaughter) we'd all starve. It used to be that the Old People packed heavy boats for the whiteman. I guess they are paying us back for that. That's enough. I don't like to talk. I can't tell them anymore how I live. I live too poorly. Some people around here kill meat but they won't give us any.

One time I was camping with two Old Men, my aspe and some other people (aspe is father's sister or mother's brother's wife. The two old men she refers to are probably Yeklezi and Dechii, her father's father and his brother.) We were starving. We moved from place to place. We moved to another place and those two men didn't even go out hunting for moose. So my aspe and I decided to hunt for porcupines. We set out and Aspe went along the river. I went up along the crest of some mountains. It was wintertime and there was deep snow. I looked down the slope but I didn't see any porcupines. It was March time and the days were getting long but already it was getting dark so I started straight down the mountain side. There was a river at the bottom and I thought that if I followed it back to camp I might find something. The snow was deep down there and there was lots of brush. I was wearing snowshoes but the snow was too deep for them too. I was walking slowly when I saw some sticks broken under a medium size spruce tree. It looked like something had broken them. I went over there. There were no tracks. I was on top of a bear den but I didn't know it. I took off my snowshoes and started to look around. There was a small hole where the snow was falling in. I took a stick and poked it. It went inside. I looked inside. There seemed to be something in there but I couldn't see. It was dark. I poked again with a long stick. It felt like there was something in there but it didn't move. It didn't growl. I was wondering what it could be. I threw lots of sticks and stones in there but nothing moved. Then I noticed a stick by the entrance that had been chewed so I put it in my pack and started back. It was late. I was tired. It was after the middle of the night when I got back. My grandfather was angry. "I thought you got a porcupine or something. I thought you were carrying some kind of meat in your pack. That's why you were late, but you didn't bring anything."

I showed my grandfather the chewed stick. "I found a bear's den but I don't think he is in there now." My grandfather called to the other people, "Hey, my granddaughter found a bear's den." That same night we all set out to find it in the moonlight. I drank tea there and then I went on with them. We took a dog with us. After we had gone some way he could smell the bear and he started barking. He wanted to chase after it but we held him. When we came to the hole we took the bear and killed him. It was a big, black bear, the kind that is almost like a grizzly and it was very fat. They started to skin it while I made a fire. We were so hungry we ate the bear's liver and tripe. That night we packed the bear meat back and we ate it. The next day we were feeling better and we moved camp again. A chinook came and it turned nice and warm. Then we got two moose. It was all right then. In May time we made boats and the men went beaver hunting. There were so many beaver you could hear the guns shooting all day long. We were at the win-

ter camp and we went up to Hudson's Hope in the spring. In fall if there was ice we had to walk back. If there was high water we would come down the river by boat.

I can hardly remember this. This happened when I was a little girl staying with my father. All the time we stayed with other people, kluge-kwon (literally fish camp people) and my grandmother. We packed our things with dogs. My grandmother must have had two dogs. All the time we moved and all the time Asu (grandmother) would wake me up and the two of us would go ahead.

One day Asu woke me up in the early morning and we went out. The other women were slow. They were behind. We set out early because Asu wanted to make kine (cambium layer of poplar bark in the springtime) bark for us to eat. We went along with the two dogs when suddenly they started barking. They were barking at a great big bull moose. Attachie (a member of one of the bands that hunted between Fort St. John and Hudson's Hope—much later Nąčhi's daughter married Attachie's youngest son) had frightened it and it had started coming this way towards us. The dogs kept barking at it and the moose was confused and just stood still. Just then we heard a noise and old man Attachie was there. He took a shot at the moose and killed it and started skinning it. He gave the moose to Asu. Attachie, your grandfather (talking to her daughter's children) just took a little meat and went on. My grandmother stayed there and started cutting up the meat. The other women didn't come though. They were too slow.

In an important paper published in *Current Anthropology* in 1978, Eleanor Leacock argued that personal autonomy is an important adaptive device in egalitarian hunting and gathering societies. "I suggest that personal autonomy was concomitant with the direct dependence of each individual on the group as a whole. Decision-making in this context calls for concepts other than ours of leader and led, dominant and deferent, no matter how loosely these are seen to apply" (Leacock 1978 249). Nąčhi's story gives substance to Leacock's assertion. When the two old men who would have been identified as the band's leaders by an observer whose own culture assumes the existence of social hierarchy and male dominance, failed to make contact with the trails of animals in their dreams, a girl and a young woman took the obvious and rational course of action. They went hunting. Each was perfectly able to spend the day alone in the bush. Their activities were co-ordinated in that they divided the territory into river bottom and high ground in order to maximize their chances of success, but the actual hunt required that each woman work her territory alone. Their actions as described by Nąčhi perfectly illustrate Leacock's insight into the connection between personal autonomy and direct dependence of each individual on the group as a whole in hunting and gathering societies.

In addition to illustrating a characteristic style of boreal forest subsistence strategy, the story also tells us something about the sources of this old woman's medicine powers. The story is crisp in this detail like the squeak of winter snow underfoot. It is late winter. The days are getting longer but as yet both land and water are painted into a continuum by snow's winter robe. The moon is close to full, probably waning gibbous because the people travel by moonlight long after the sun has gone under the rim of land. The bears are still hidden as they dream of spring's return. They have left their tracks far behind in the landscape of another season. The girl who carries the seeds of an old woman inside her receives no nourishment from her long walk out along the height of land. She circles down to return by the river bottom where the snow has

drifted softly up to the height of the willows that mark the river's edge. The only tracks to be seen are the soft impressions of her own snowshoes in the fluffy heap of wind drifted snow.

Another being who lies below the path she is making has left its own tracks far behind. It is the dreamer who waits for her to interpret the subtle language of a sign left to indicate the presence of this other mind and body. There are teeth marks on a stick. She carries the message home to the people who wait hungrily for some change in their situation. The sign tells of many changes. Later that same night, the hungry people are nourished under the light of a moon that casts their shadows on the shimmering screen of snow. Later in her life, this moment of contact with the dreamer's shadow will give this woman strength to dream for other people.

To those who listen with intelligence, Nachi's story is a revelation of her innermost nature. Her grandchildren sometimes teased her that she was big like a bear, but their teasing reflected a deeper level of meaning. In that moment alone in the bush long ago, the young girl received a gift that she could return to her people for years to come.

The vision quest stories of Naĉhi and Sitama are typical of Beaver women from their generation. Both grew up in nomadic hunting and trapping bands. Both were important members of their communities when I knew them. Both were known as people with power in their later years. Both took an active part in teaching cultural traditions to their children and grandchildren. Their vision quest stories were familiar enough to these younger people to be included in conversations they had with an anthropologist.

The stories gave people information from which to deduce the medicine powers of Beaver women and men. In addition to personal vision quest stories, people knew mythic accounts of the culture hero and his encounters with the giant animals. The myths provided clues to the personal taboos and powers of people whose vision quest stories were common knowledge. Hypotheses generated by putting the personal and mythic stories together were used to interpret the personal ritual behaviour of people with power. Abstinence from a particular food or avoidance of certain activities were directly related to both vision quest stories and myths. I did not obtain information about the personal rituals of Naĉhi and Sitama because I never lived directly in their households but I am certain their taboos and avoidances were symbolic of events in the stories of their medicine animals.

Conclusion

In her introduction to *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, the editor wrote, "there is not a massive amount of such work (written from a woman's perspective) available, and what exists is not widely used by most anthropologists in their research and teaching, but is consigned to a feminist ghetto within anthropology" (Reiter 1975 13). I hope that the information and analysis presented in this paper will contribute to bringing the anthropology of women closer to the mainstream of anthropological concern. In 1971, I declined the challenge of following my own contact with the experience of women in traditional Beaver culture. Because of my contact with the energy and intelligence of women within my own culture, I am now prepared to place the energy and intelligence of women like Sitama and Naĉhi at the center of the ongoing story which I am telling about the Beaver people. I am fortunate in knowing a culture that traditionally valued personal autonomy above social and sexual hierarchy. Our own society is being shaken by the struggle of women to free themselves from generations of disadvantage. I hope these stories of vision quests among traditional Beaver women will help women in our time pursue their own visions with wisdom and courage.

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