

## Condoms are for whitefellas: barriers to Pitjantjatjara men's use of safe sex technologies

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This paper reports on ethnographic research on the culture-specific barriers that masculinity poses to preventing HIV transmission in the sexual lives of Pitjantjatjara men. The investigation had three objectives: investigating how the Pitjantjatjara people model the physical and social development of adult male bodies; describing the nature, range and cultural dynamics of sexual practice among Pitjantjatjara men; and delineating health and infection risks posed by sexual practice. The study used classical ethnographic approaches to investigate the deployment of men's bodies within systems of cultural production and reproduction, and post-Foucauldian analysis to examine culture-specific technologies of the self. Data were collected using participant observation, key informant interviews, and sexual life history interviews. Key findings are that the Pitjantjatjara deploy the capacities for reproduction and pleasure of men's bodies in culturally specific ways, and that men are trained in culturally approved uses of these capacities in ways that are resistant to change. The introduction of safe sex technologies in this context requires close attention to the specific content and methods by which men's self understandings are developed.

### Introduction

*kalu* noun (sensitive language) prick, penis. Used by men in strong insults and sexual horseplay, in male company only. (Goddard 1992: 29)

Since HIV and AIDS first became an issue for health promotion in Australia in the mid-1980s, organizations delivering health services to more traditional Aboriginal populations in the centre and north of the country have had to grapple with how best to respond. Prevention efforts have been facilitated by the geographic and epidemiological isolation of many traditional communities from the HIV epidemic in Australia which has been mainly focussed in the urban dwelling gay male populations of Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane (National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research 2000).

Australia has been generally successful in containing the HIV epidemic, and there have been declining rates of HIV transmission since 1985 and a steady decline in annual AIDS incidence since 1994. Official estimates suggest that more than 80% of cases of HIV infection have been acquired through male homosexual contact (National Centre for HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research 2000). Although the per capita rates of HIV and

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AIDS diagnoses have differed little between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations in Australia, this has resulted in relatively few HIV diagnoses in Aboriginal people. Official statistics record that there were only 155 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people living with HIV at the end of 2000, although most Australian States and Territories did not systematically record Indigenous status as part of the HIV notification process until the middle of the 1990s (Willis *et al.* 2002).

Despite the low rate of HIV prevalence, there has been considerable concern about the potential for an explosive epidemic of HIV in the rural and remote dwelling Aboriginal population, partly because prevalence rates of other sexually transmissible infections (STI) are very high in these populations, and the presence of other STIs is an often cited cofactor in HIV transmission in other parts of the world (National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research 2000: 51–55, Ferry 1995). The National Indigenous Australians' Sexual Health Strategy reports, for example, that the Aboriginal rates of gonorrhoea in some Australian states are 10 to 150 times higher than among non-Aboriginal populations. Chlamydia rates are three to 16 times higher, and similar disparity occurs in recorded notifications for syphilis (ANCARD Working Party on Indigenous Australians' Sexual Health 1997: 28–29).

The same strategy recommends a range of measures to prevent the spread of blood-borne and other sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS. These measures include education programmes 'that not only provide information on reducing risks but also support broader behaviour change within communities', as well as 'the provision of equipment that avoid risks—condoms, clean needles and single-use equipment for ceremonial use' (ANCARD Working Party on Indigenous Australians' Sexual Health 1997: 6).

How do you promote condom use in a culture that does not have a polite way to talk about penises? In many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, traditional values govern the gender structure of knowledge and practices relating to health and sex. In this paper, the scope of such traditional values among Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara men will be examined, and the cultural formations of gender and sexuality through which these values inform practice. The Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara (hereafter Pitjantjatjara for ease of reading) are closely related Aboriginal peoples of Australia's central desert region who continue to follow a mainly traditional lifestyle in their ancestral country to the south and west of Alice Springs. By traditional it is here meant: practices and values that predate substantial contact with Western colonial culture. Such a definition accounts for most parts of life for the Pitjantjatjara, who have had a relatively short exposure to colonial culture. The first visitor to their country was the explorer Giles in 1872 (Layton 1986: 52). The first European settlement in their country did not occur until the establishment of Ernabella mission in 1936, although there were pastoral stations established in bordering regions—that is, within several hundred kilometres—as early as 1877 (Toyne and Vachon 1984, Layton 1986, Willis 1997).

The transition for many Pitjantjatjara people from a completely nomadic to a more sedentary village-based lifestyle occurred between the late-1940s

and the middle of the 1990s, when the most recent new village, Wanarn, was established. Gould's ethno-archaeological work in the late-1960s suggests that there had been little cultural change in the region up until that time (Gould 1968, 1969, 1977, 1980). During the fieldwork connected with this study from 1985 to 1997, many of the informants recalled growing up naked, meeting their first white person, and learning and employing hunting and gathering techniques for survival that had been in place, in Gould's estimation, for more than 6000 years (Gould 1977). They proudly pointed to photographs of themselves as children and young adults in the 'classic' ethnographies of Mountford (1950, 1971, 1976) and Tindale (1974).

Even in 2002, participation in traditional hunting and gathering, as well as religious and ceremonial activities, remain relatively routine in Pitjantjatjara communities, although many such practices have been somewhat modified by the introduction of western technology including the motor vehicle and the rifle, the availability of telephones, television and the Internet since the early-1990s, and the presence of Western consumer goods through local general stores since the late-1970s.

### Methods

Despite the changes that increased contact with Western culture are bringing, the Pitjantjatjara people maintain a distinctive and highly structured way of constructing adult masculinity and male sexuality which begins at puberty with initiation rites, (Willis 1997, but see also Spencer and Gillen 1899, Basedow 1935, Berndt and Berndt 1945, Mountford 1950, Gill 1968, Gould 1969). Fieldwork was conducted in a settlement of approximately 200 Pitjantjatjara people situated in the south-east corner of the Northern Territory. Field methods, based in classic anthropological technique as well as in the post-structural investigation of subjectivities, included participant observation, key informant interviews and sexual life history interviews with Pitjantjatjara men (and some women). The research was informed by an extensive historical literature on desert dwelling Aboriginal peoples, as well as contemporaneous epidemiological research conducted by the regional health service, Nganampa Health Council.

The first section of this paper, examines the cultural, ecological and historical context of Pitjantjatjara masculinity and male sexuality. The ritual process by which boys become men is then described, along with the physical and social changes that presage male adulthood in this culture. The implications of these changes for male sexuality are examined, and the implications for sexual health promotion in the context of HIV/AIDS outlined.<sup>1</sup>

### Findings

#### *Ecological, historical and cultural context*

It is an axiom of the social constructionist paradigm that specific forms of masculinity and male sexuality are contingent on the particular cultural,

ecological and historical conditions in which they arise (Gagnon and Parker 1995). To comprehend Pitjantjatjara models of the physical and social development of adult male bodies, it is therefore necessary to understand the physical, historical and cultural context in which these models operate. For the Pitjantjatjara, the most important feature of their models is that they have evolved during a long physical and cultural history of harsh arid zone occupation.

The Pitjantjatjara have been able to survive this history because of three factors. Firstly, they are a conservative culture and have developed a successful adaptation to the extreme vagaries of life in the Great Victoria Desert that allows for only limited innovation. Secondly, in the absence of a written culture, they have developed an enormous oral literature, *Tjukurpa*, which not only details effective adaptive strategies, but also records millennia of detailed ecological information essential for survival. Thirdly, in order to maximize the extractive opportunities of individuals they have developed systems of social organization that allow for flexible group formation which make the best use of the productive capacities of people and land at a given time, and also ensures that information and social rules contained in *Tjukurpa* are transmitted within and between generations.

#### *Organized risk-minimizing opportunism*

The successful and ancient Pitjantjatjara cultural adaptation to desert life is based on the seasonal use of limited water resources, and can be simply characterized as a system of nomadic movement between temporary water sources in rainy seasons and permanent water sources in dry seasons. The unchanging ecology of Australia's desert region over millennia has meant that this adaptation is extremely conservative. The archaeological record demonstrates that there has been little change in the last 6000 years, and suggests that this adaptive conservatism may possibly have characterized the last 20,000 of human occupation of the Western Desert. The archaeologist Richard Gould has called the Pitjantjatjara adaptation organized risk-minimizing opportunism because, despite its conservatism over time, it is based on flexible individual and group responses to ecological challenge (Gould 1969, 1977).

The flexibility in these responses falls within defined parameters that are recorded in *Tjukurpa*, the religious philosophy of the Pitjantjatjara (sometimes translated as Dreaming Law). *Tjukurpa* is a broad-based and complex system of rules that takes the form of an oral tradition including songs, stories and mappings. Structured as convoluted tales of the creation of the world, *Tjukurpa* records the journeys of mythical ancestral beings, whose activities created the physical form of the world and set in place the rules that govern relationships between people and with the land. The tales encode ecological information about places in the landscape, record successful and unsuccessful adaptive tactics, link human beings with land in a systematic but flexible way, and lay out a blueprint for co-operation that is binding yet allows for choices that can accommodate a broad range of

situations. The ancestors whose travels are recorded in *Tjukurpa* remain immanent in the physical world as *kurunitja* (spiritual essence), which permeates physical locations and forms the substance of all within the world, including human beings. Human beings absorb ancestral *kurunitja* from the landscape in which they live, from the moment they are conceived till they die. In this way, *kurunitja* fundamentally links human beings to particular sites on the land because both are manifestations of the same ancestral essence (Spencer and Gillen 1899, 1927, Berndt and Berndt 1945, Strehlow 1947, 1971, Mountford 1950, 1976, Hiatt 1975, Stanner 1979, Bell 1983, Munn 1984, Layton 1986, Myers 1986, Morton 1989, Lester 1993, Tjamiwa 1992 and Willis 1997).

The system of rules established in *Tjukurpa* articulates with an equally complex social organization, the main elements of which include the distribution of productive and reproductive labour by gender, and a kinship and political system that maximizes opportunities for the formation of viable groups for co-operative extraction of food and other resources from the land. These social systems are geared towards maximizing people's opportunities in the worst seasons. Kin relationships are structured by *Tjukurpa*, with a flexibility that allows for almost limitless extension of those one can call on as family as ecological conditions demand. The result has been maximum mobility of individuals within territorially-defined, resource-exploiting groups that together make up an intricate and geographically vast network of links between land, individuals and groups.

This mobility is managed through kinship and marriage rules. Kinship between people is reckoned cognatically, and consanguineal, affinal and fraternal kin relations are recognized. Relationships to land are also reckoned in a structurally similar way. Consanguineal relationships to a site are established through coming into being in the vicinity of that site, or through inheriting such a relationship of shared essence from either parents or grandparents. In this way, children are born with close kinship relations to a range of *ngura* (places or countries), including their own birth countries and those of their parents and grandparents.

This kind of relationship with land confers responsibility for maintaining the resources of the land, and also rights to exploit both the resources and sacred knowledge of those sites. All those who share affiliation with a site form a territorially defined group of landowners. Membership of these groups is not limited to those who were born at a place, or who have inherited membership from their parents.

'Affinal' relationships to land can be developed through marriage into a land-holding group. A culturally and territorially defined genealogical matrix encompasses all Pitjantjatjara people; those who are neither consanguineal nor affinal kin are recognized as fraternal kin. The main mechanism for ordering these fraternal kin is membership of alternating cross-generational, endogamous moieties. This means that every Pitjantjatjara person can be recognized as a close or distant relative, and by knowing a person's moiety and gender, one can calculate whether a new acquaintance is a fictive 'brother', 'uncle' or 'grandfather'.

As with consanguineal and affinal relationships, fraternal relationship can be established with land, typically through long residence at a place

(such that a form of blood-brotherhood is established with the place, mirroring the relationship established with members of the group who hold the land). *Tjukurpa* establishes in some detail the way that various kinds of kin must act towards each other, as well as the kinds of rights and responsibilities that the various types of kinship with land confer. In this way, kinship organization and marriage rules are key organizing principles that ensure the continuity of territorially-defined land-owning groups, the maintenance of resources (particularly water resources and variation of habitat through burning), and the continuous passage of knowledge, including valuable ecological knowledge, of the *Tjukurpa* of the site (Turner 1980, Layton 1983, Willis 1997).

*The social construction of Pitjantjatjara men*

Pitjantjatjara culture also allows for the ordering of social life by gender, age and ceremonial status. Pitjantjatjara men move to social and physical adulthood through a series of rituals that prepare them, physically and intellectually, to fulfil the key roles of adult male life: to contribute to the ongoing reproduction of the cosmos by participating in secret men's ritual; to enhance their own physical survival, and that of their land-holding groups, by making advantageous alliances with other land-holding groups through marriage; and to ensure the reproduction of their land-holding group by fathering children.

Men's ritual is viewed as essential to the ongoing reproduction of the cosmos, which it does by re-enacting key incidents in the travels of particular ancestral beings. In Pitjantjatjara ontology, human bodies share the essence of ancestral beings that were responsible for the creation of the land and cultural practices that sustain life. Ritual takes this one step further: in ritual, Pitjantjatjara bodies become permanently or temporarily identified with the bodies of these ancestral beings. These processes of identification affect the meaning of particular body parts relevant to the transmission of sexually transmissible infections (STIs), specifically blood, the skin and the penis. Blood is the concrete form of ancestral and human *kurunitja*, and is used in ceremonial decoration to effect the transformation of human to ancestral body. The skin is the ceremonial canvas on which the ritual transformation of human to ancestral bodies is made manifest. The penis, through circumcision and subincision, is a permanent physical manifestation of men's ritual identification with the bodies of the particular male ancestral beings responsible for shaping men's ritual.

There are four main ways in which these changes to men's bodies affect their participation as agents in sexual relationships. Firstly, there are tight controls over the disposition of men's bodies from the period immediately before initiation until eventual marriage. These controls, which last for some years, mean that men are, ideally, effectively unavailable to enter into sexual relationships of any kind except those prescribed by the marriage system or otherwise tolerated as consistent with the marriage system. Sexual identity is wrought through initiation and men's ongoing ritual involvement, and continues to be shaped by conventions and ideals of

behaviour expressed explicitly through ritual instruction, and implicitly through the example of other men's conduct and the sexual behaviour of ancestral beings recorded in *Tjukurpa*.

Secondly, specific bodily changes (for example, the removal of one or other of the front upper incisors indicates moiety in initiated men), bodily dispositions (for example, unmarried initiated men sleep in a separate camp), and clothing or decorative codes (for example, the *yakiri* or red headband is only worn by initiated men) mark unmarried, initiated men as available for sexual liaisons or marriage with appropriate women (see below).

Thirdly, the reshaping through ritual operations of the penis and the use or partially erect penises in various rituals, govern to an extent what kinds of sexual acts are pleasurable and feasible. Ritual significance is inscribed on the penis and strongly determines what kinds of use of sexual organs men are willing or able to contemplate as part of their personal sexual repertoires. As well, the newly exposed glans and mucosal lining of the urethra after circumcision and subincision are quite fragile and sensitive. Pitjantjatjara rules seem to take into account that the vagina is soft and naturally lubricated, and that vaginal intercourse is the least likely form of sexual interaction to cause damage to a subincised penis.

Fourth, the involvement of the penis in the most secret men's rituals provides a layer of important meanings to the penis. Aspects of these ceremonies are kept secret from women and the uninitiated, and ritual changes to the organ are usually concealed from women at least until it had healed. Women do not look at men's penises (especially these days when men wear trousers most of the time), and there are clearly expressed rules against women touching or handling men's penises. Sexual intercourse between men and women is limited by explicit rule and in men's accounts to vaginal penetration. Because of the role of manual manipulation of the penis to achieve the partial erection required in some ceremonies, masturbation outside ceremonial contexts is regarded as mildly sacrilegious and puerile. The cutting ceremonies involved in male initiation establish affinal relationships between the initiate and the men from the opposite moiety who cut him. The cutters, called *waputju*, promise to provide a wife for the man from among their daughters and patrilineal nieces. Over the course of his initiation, a man might collect such promises from between 10 and 20 *waputju*. All Pitjantjatjara men marry, and all wives are chosen from among this group of women who are called his *pikatja*, or promised wives. The only appropriate sexual activity for an adult man is vaginal intercourse with a woman whose father is his *waputju*.

#### *Romance and risk: the sexual life of wati*

The conventions of Pitjantjatjara romantic life place *wati* at significant risk of contracting sexually transmissible diseases, and STI transmission rates in the Pitjantjatjara area amply demonstrate the reality of this increased risk (Mulvey and Manderson 1995). Recent figures from Nganampa Health Council, which delivers primary health care to Pitjantjatjara communities

in northwest South Australia, reveal shockingly high prevalence rates for all major STIs. The gonorrhoea prevalence rate for 1996 was 14,297/100,000 which was 841 times the Australian national notification rate. Chlamydia prevalence for Pitjantjatjara communities was 8,792/100,000, which was 157 times the national notification rate. The prevalence of syphilis was 256/100,000 which was 106 times the national rate (Miller 1996: 1).

There are many factors leading to these extraordinary infection rates. Pitjantjatjara conventions do not prohibit or discourage multiple sexual partners, but merely limit who these partners can be. There are few sanctions against men entering into multiple concurrent sexual relationships, provided that the relationships are conducted with women who belong to the correct generational moiety and who stand as fictive daughters to the ceremonial operants who participated in his initiation rites. As well, discretion has to be maintained in the case of affairs involving married people, and all adults must enter into at least one primary sexual relationship that produces children whose legitimacy is guaranteed. Given that clear correlations exist between the number of sexual partners and the risk of transmission of STIs, and that relationships of a more transitory nature are associated with a higher risk of STI transmission, Pitjantjatjara sexual conventions favour higher transmission rates (Cleland *et al.* 1995: 209).

The conventional behavioural content of these relationships is also of some importance. Apart from the primary marriage relationship, most Pitjantjatjara relationships are structured around brief private assignments that focus on vaginal intercourse. This not only means that a great proportion of private encounters between men and women are sexual encounters, but also that there is little sexual activity that is not penetrative. Penetrative sex clearly carries a greater risk of STI transmission (see, for example, Peiperl 1995: 9). Structural features of relationships, particularly the fact that cohorts of related men draw their sexual partners from among the same group of women, also have impacts on transmission rates, including causing minor STI 'epidemics' within cohorts.

Cultural barriers to the acceptability of condoms have resulted in the highest proportion of Pitjantjatjara sexual activity being unprotected. These barriers are manifold. The ritual associations of the penis work against the use of condoms because this requires a man to handle his penis in the presence of a woman partner. Handling the penis in a sexual context, even for a man, is likely to be viewed as sacrilegious and puerile. The shape of an erect, subincised penis means that conventional condoms are difficult and uncomfortable to put on, and this lack of ease has been exacerbated by the distribution by Central Australian health services of black, shiny condoms that are narrower and less flexible than conventional condoms. This has led to a generalized perception among Pitjantjatjara men that condoms do not fit *wati* penises, and, even more dangerously, that they are designed for uninitiated (that is, boys') penises, and are, in principle, unsuitable for use by initiated men. This perception has been supported by the use of penile models by non-Aboriginal health workers to demonstrate condom use, where both health workers and the penile models are clearly uninitiated.



Further barriers to condom use include the fact that men's sexual and ritual education emphasizes the new shape of the penis after subincision as being a better 'fit' for vaginal intercourse, and more exciting and satisfying for both partners. The effect of a condom is to pull the sides of the opened-out urethra back together, so that the special shape (and sound in intercourse) of the subincised penis is lost. Further, the condom is associated by appearance with the foreskin, and with the uninitiated. Most damning, neither *Tjukurpa* nor the elders of the ceremonial camp specifically sanction the use of condoms, and so men aren't sure that using a condom is consistent with the Law relating to appropriate *wati* sexual practice. At the same time, the increased surface area of the penis after subincision, the sensitivity of the exposed mucosal surfaces, and the frequency of urethral infections are all important co-factors in the transmission of STIs.

As well as barriers to condom use, there are barriers to making condoms available in Pitjantjatjara communities. Here is a device whose only association is with men's erect penises, and with sexual intercourse. These are both subjects governed by strict ceremonial laws, and which are not spoken about in public. There are obvious limits to where condoms can be made available, and to whom. Neither women nor the uninitiated should have access to them: women, because they should not have any involvement with things to do with men's penises; and the uninitiated, because they should not have any involvement with sexual matters. Distribution must therefore be confined to areas of the community where only initiated men have access, of which there are few. In Talitjara, community policy dictated that the only public place from which condoms could be distributed was the health clinic, a place where few men went unless they were ill, and which was only open for 6 hours a day, Monday to Friday. The chances of young men voluntarily going to the clinic, which was mainly frequented by women and children, simply to get condoms were very small.

The final substantial barriers to condom use are psychological. There is no fear of pregnancy, even in casual relationships, because reproduction is highly valued. In other societies, fear of pregnancy outside a legally sanctioned relationship has led to an association between sex and protection against pregnancy that simply does not exist for the Pitjantjatjara. Introducing barriers to the exchange of fluids into a sexual relationship seems a novel and unpleasant idea to Pitjantjatjara men. Additionally, STIs are not seen as a particular source of shame or threat, partly because sex itself is not seen as shameful, and partly because reproductive and urinary tract infections are sufficiently commonplace for genital infections to have become disassociated from sex. As most men frequently contract bacterial infections after ceremonial activity, STIs are simply viewed as another bacterial infection to be dealt with by the clinic. The promotion of HIV as a new STI has led to a perception among Pitjantjatjara men that it is another kind of genital infection that can be treated by injection at the clinic. The corollary of this perception is that an HIV infection will be obvious in a sexual partner because of the presence of pus, or a bad smell, and that only having sex with 'clean' women will provide the protection necessary to avoid becoming infected with HIV.

The lack of potential for communication between men and women about sexual matters is a third major factor leading to high STI infection rates, because it prevents partners from negotiating safe sex. A primary prevention message in Western societies has been that knowing your partners and their sexual history is important in judging the risks that you are taking (see, for example, Bolton 1993: 31). Further, sexual and reproductive health models suggest that a key factor in the maintenance of women's sexual health is their capacity to negotiate safe sexual encounters, in terms of both violence and disease (Dixon-Mueller 1993: 274–275). In most Pitjantjatjara casual relationships, it is unlikely that a sufficient degree of intimacy could be achieved for any sharing of sexual histories to take place, and even more unlikely that the woman could effectively negotiate the use of a condom.

The last major factor affecting the heightened risk of transmission of STIs among the Pitjantjatjara is that prevention education is typically designed and delivered by people who are not Pitjantjatjara. Given the centrality of sexuality to secret ritual, it is obvious that effective sexual education cannot be delivered by outsiders, nor can it be effectively delivered in non-ritual contexts (both physical and social), using Western-style marketing techniques that are divorced from institutionalized modes for ritual/sexual education, or framed in language or concepts of sexuality that conflict with Pitjantjatjara religious values.

### Discussion

It is clear from the above discussion that the key challenges for an HIV prevention strategy are to raise the acceptability of condoms, and to educate men to wear them. This can only be achieved through refocusing the HIV/AIDS debate in Pitjantjatjara communities around the issue of HIV as a disease that affects the blood rather than the genitals, and a disease that can be passed on through exchanges of blood, as well as through exchanges of other fluids. For men, this means focussing on HIV as a disease that a man can catch from a woman through sex, but pass on to his brothers and brothers-in-law through ceremonies. Raising awareness of HIV as a disease of men's ritual brings prevention strategies including the use of condoms in sex into alignment with men's secret Law. Wearing condoms in sexual encounters outside primary relationships should be promoted as a way of protecting and maintaining the integrity of men's ritual. Because men's ritual education already addresses issues of correct sexual behaviour and appropriate uses of the penis, then the same education processes and contexts can be used to promote the use of condoms.

This strategy would mean that those who have the primary responsibility for the maintenance of the Law, *tjilpi tjuta* (i.e. all the old men), would have to be committed to the promotion of condoms. There are a number of encouraging signs that this may be the case: the research reported in this paper was originally sponsored by *tjilpi* who were concerned about issues of the sexual and ritual transmission of HIV; and core ritual practices have already been modified in small ways to allow for safer ceremonial

practice to occur. With the support of the old men, post ceremonial education could also include how to use condoms, demonstrated by *wati* from the same moiety as those being instructed. Given that most men are naked anyway in this situation, and that there is little embarrassment about achieving erections in ceremonial contexts, instructors could demonstrate the use of condoms on their own bodies, eliminating the need for inappropriate and inaccurate penile models and clearly associating condoms with initiated men's business.

There is an urgent need, however, to identify a better fitting condom, and to develop marketing strategies for condoms that allow for 24 hour distribution in ways that are satisfactory to conservative community councils. Although it may be quite difficult to get a condom designed specifically for the *wati* penis (the market would be very small), there are condoms available in the American and Japanese markets (for example, the Trojan Extra Large) that would be worth testing. Ushma Scales, a male anthropologist working for Nganampa Health, has been investigating these possibilities in recent months, including packaging 'easy-fit' condoms as '*Wati-doms*' (Scales 1996b). With regard to distribution strategies, some South Australian communities have been developing simple and discrete condom vending machines and placing them in public areas throughout the community, but out of reach of children. Although there is still little evidence that men are using condoms in these communities, the vending machines have achieved some degree of acceptability and have not been vandalized.

These strategies do not obviate the need for appropriate clinical services for the detection and treatment of STIs, particularly because existing STIs, particularly ulcerative diseases including genital ulcer disease, syphilis and donovanosis, are cofactors in the transmission of HIV (see Ferry 1995: 194–199). Nganampa Health Council has adopted an eight point strategy for preventing HIV, which includes: programme planning, policy and management; clinical services; health hardware (i.e., safe sex and safe ceremonies supplies including condoms, piercing and cutting instruments); health promotion; training; surveillance; research; and evaluation (Miller 1996: 2). The research described here has fed into part of this strategy. It was suggested that some of the transmission of STIs through ceremonies could be eliminated if men were encouraged to have a 'Well Men's' screening prior to the ceremonial season, including screening and treatment (if required) for existing STIs. The idea was to mimic the organization of a ceremony: get all the men together in a bush location close to the community, divide them by moiety, and test everyone together, using the opportunity to deliver targeted peer education to identified risk groups ('youngfellas' and what Ushma Scales has termed '*Town-itja*'—people from remote communities who spend a lot of time in town (Scales 1996a: 6). Nganampa Health has tested a modified version of this strategy with great success in Pipalytjatjara community: a video night for men was hosted in the local clinic, with action videos and free soft drinks. While the videos were playing, men were cycled through an STI screening in an adjacent room. This was combined with small bush meetings of risk groups on following days promoting the use of condoms during trips to Alice Springs. Although

there has been no evaluation of how effective the education proved, the combined strategy cleared the first major hurdle—that of acceptability to the community—and achieved good participation (Scales 1996b).

### Conclusion

The Pitjantjatjara have no word for risk. The closest that Anangu come to the concept is their use of the English word ‘danger’, which loosely translates the traditional concept *miilmilpa*—that is, sacred. When Gould speaks of organized risk-minimizing opportunism in relation to Pitjantjatjara resource extraction strategy, he is speaking of a concept that is a subset of a much wider Pitjantjatjara philosophical position: namely, *Tjukurpaku kulilpai*, always listening to, or following, the Law. Opportunism deceptively implies flexibility or openness to change or innovation, but the Pitjantjatjara are only flexible within rigid boundaries, innovative in strictly limited ways, and almost completely inattentive to change that does not fall within closely defined parameters. One informant in the study, Tjamiwa, observed that European Australia law was written on pieces of paper that could be blown away by the wind; by contrast, Pitjantjatjara law, like the Ten Commandments, is carved in stone. Danger (or risk) comes from not following the Law. Yet within the rigidity of their system, the Pitjantjatjara frequently display surprising and imaginative flexibility. The opportunism, and indeed syncretism, of their systems of thought have allowed them to survive in one of the world’s harshest environments for perhaps 20000 years.

I once had a unique opportunity to watch the incredible agility of this opportunism at work. I sat with two old men one Sunday night watching the film ‘Dangerous Liaisons’ on television. The film is a sordid tale of devious sexual plotting in the 18th century French Royal Court, dense with plot twists and turns. The two *tjilpi*, neither of whom spoke English well enough to follow the dialogue, kept up a running commentary of the relationships and action of the film, constantly adapting their model with each fresh plot twist. As relationships previously interpreted as filial or fraternal suddenly developed an incestuous tone, the Pitjantjatjara map of the relationships shifted to accommodate this new turning. The duel which ends the antihero’s life towards the end was interpreted with grim satisfaction as a jealous fight in the Pitjantjatjara tradition, and the subsequent public disgrace of the anti-heroine interpreted as an equivalent of the Pitjantjatjara mourning ritual, complete with funerary ashes. The old men thoroughly enjoyed the experience, and were delighted with the coherence of this ‘whitefella’ tale of love and death, a coherence often missing for them in ‘whitefella’ films.

Pitjantjatjara *tjilpi* have already demonstrated their adaptive capacity in adopting safe ceremonial measures that have altered ceremonial practice without affecting ritual integrity (for example, the provision of single use sterile cutting and piercing instruments in place of more traditional, shared implements). The challenge remains for them to adapt ‘whitefella’ sexual protection technology, including the condom, to the task of reducing the

multiple risks facing them in the era of AIDS: the risks to the transmission of their culture in their adaptation to changing epidemiological circumstances; the risks to the health of their young people from STIs, including HIV; and, finally, the risks to the cultural coherence of their system of sexuality as changing material circumstances undermine the ecological imperatives that have historically driven their social organization.

### Notes

1. Some of the matters canvassed in this paper are considered by Pitjantjatjara men and women to be of considerable gender sensitivity. In current practice in their culture, men's ceremonial practice and reproductive anatomy are not discussed in mixed groups of men and women, except in the most oblique terms. Consistent with my ethical agreements with Pitjantjatjara men and with men's ceremonial law, I have not discussed anything in the paper which is considered gender embargoed knowledge by them. However some of the matters discussed in the sections on the ritual formation of Pitjantjatjara men and their sexual lives are matters that Pitjantjatjara men and women do not discuss openly together.

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## Résumé

Cet article rend compte d'une recherche ethnographique sur les obstacles spécifiquement culturels à la prévention du VIH dans la vie sexuelle des hommes pitjantjatjara, liés à la masculinité. La recherche avait trois objectifs: examiner comment le peuple pitjantjatjara modélise le développement physique et social du corps adulte masculin; décrire la nature, la gamme et la dynamique culturelle des pratiques sexuelles chez les hommes pitjantjatjara; et déterminer les risques pour la santé auxquels exposent ces

pratiques. L'étude a employé des approches ethnographiques classiques pour enquêter sur le développement des corps masculins dans des systèmes de production et de reproduction culturelles, et une analyse post-foucauldienne pour examiner les technologies spécifiques à la culture du moi. Les données proviennent d'une observation participante, d'entretiens avec des informateurs clé, et d'entretiens centrés sur les récits de vie sexuelle. Le résultat principal de l'étude est que les Pitjantjatjara développent les capacités des corps masculins à la reproduction et au plaisir de manière spécifiquement culturelle, et que les hommes sont formés à des usages culturellement approuvés de ces capacités, résistants aux changements. L'introduction de méthodes de sexe sans risque dans ce contexte requiert une attention particulière vis à vis du contenu et des méthodes spécifiques par lesquels la compréhension du moi se développe chez ces hommes.

### **Resumen**

En este documento se reporta un estudio etnográfico en el que se analizaron los obstáculos culturales que plantea la masculinidad para prevenir la transmisión del virus del sida en la vida sexual de los hombres de etnia Pitjantjatjara. La investigación tenía tres objetivos: estudiar que tipo de modelo tiene el pueblo Pitjantjatjara para el desarrollo físico y social de los cuerpos de hombres adultos; describir la dinámica cultural, la naturaleza y el alcance de las prácticas sexuales entre los hombres Pitjantjatjara; y definir los riesgos de infección y a la salud de las prácticas sexuales. Los enfoques etnográficos clásicos utilizados en este estudio sirvieron para investigar qué uso se hace de los cuerpos masculinos dentro de los sistemas de producción y reproducción cultural y examinar, según un análisis post-foucauldiano, las tecnologías específicamente culturales del Yo. Se recabaron datos a partir de la observación de participante, entrevistas a informantes claves y entrevistas sobre relatos de la vida sexual. Los resultados principales muestran que los Pitjantjatjara utilizan las capacidades reproductoras y el placer de los cuerpos masculinos de una manera determinada por su cultura y que los hombres están educados para hacer un uso, culturalmente aprobado, de esas capacidades, de formas que son muy difíciles cambiar. En este contexto, cuando se trata de introducir técnicas que aseguren relaciones sexuales sin riesgos hay que prestar atención al contenido y a los métodos específicos por los que se desarrollan la autoconciencia de los hombres.