

1. Description

1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family:

Society: Mardudjara, Marngu

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com):

Cannot acquire language code because the culture is not listed on ethnologue.com

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

Straddle the Tropic of Capricorn between 122 degrees and 125 degrees East (2)

1.4 Brief history:

Colonization of Australia dates from 40,000 years ago- no real contact or westernization until last decade or so (1)

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:

With the exception of sea slug gatherers and Melanesian traders, there has been little contact with the outside world (1)

1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

Area with sandhills, sandflats and spinifex grasses (1)

Water is gained from springs, rockholes and other impermanent structures. Overall the environment is very harsh (1)

Rainfall of 5-10 inches per year (1)

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density

It was nearly impossible to correctly estimate the exact population size because the Mardudjara traveled in bands of 15-20 people in the desert and it was very difficult to get an accurate reading of how many bands existed. The population density at this earlier time was approximately 1 person per 91 square kilometers of desert. (2)

Currently, there are about 1,000 Mardudjara most of which live in the settlement of Jigalong. However, there are others who live in communities on the outskirts of the desert. The general population has increased since the Mardudjara have established Jigalong as the primary settlement. (2)

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

Plant seeds ground into flour, yams, blackberries, figs, quandong, bush tomatoes (1)

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

Emu, lizards, small marsupials, kangaroos (1)

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

Boomerang, spear, throwing spear, flake knives and shields (1)

2.4 Food storage:

Most food is eaten easily without leftovers (food sources are limited) but bush tomatoes are preserved for many months (1)

2.5 Sexual division of production:

The women do gathering and cooking preparation/cleaning, men are involved in hunting and pit cooking of larger game (1)

2.6 Land tenure:

Traditionally, bands of 15-20 people occupied certain desert grounds. However, they did not own the land and tenure belonged to estate groups. Currently, the Jigalong is "reserve" of sorts for the Mardu people, but they have not gained tenure over traditional desert lands. (2)

2.7 Ceramics:

Tools for foodsuffs are usually made up of stone blocks (1)

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

Large game is shared throughout the band and portions are determined by kinship. Plants are shared within the family, but non family members who are elderly may receive portions (1)

2.9 Food taboos:

2.10 Canoes/watercraft? N/A

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

Men: 5'6'' Women: 5'2'' (1)

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

Relatively thin (1)

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f):

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

Women are generally married when they are of childbearing age; then after marriage they begin to bear children

Men are married and begin having kids in their late twenties after they have completed their rites of passage into manhood (1)

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

Family size can have a very great range depending on whether or not the family is a polygynous

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

Inter-birth interval is high because of harsh conditions and low resources in the desert (1)

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

“Around the ages of 11-12 girls are married but may spend considerable time with parents and husband lives with in-laws before moving off they move to husband’s place.” (1)

“Traditionally, men could not marry for at least a decade after their first initiatory rites, which occurred around age 16-17, but today men in their early twenties are marrying, and far fewer betrothals result in marriage.” (2)

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

Divorce is extremely rare (2)

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

Polygyny was practiced in traditional society, but is less frequent now (2)

Today, polygyny involves 25% of all marriages. This is steadily decreasing due to the economic instability of having to support many wives (3)

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:

A man who has wronged someone deeply will sometimes offer one or more of his wives for intercourse to those that he has wronged.

It is a sort of atonement in desert society (3)

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

Material possessions were minimal and usually buried with the person at death. Now, material possessions are burned or given away to distant relatives. After the death of an individual, the area surrounding his or her camp is often vacated and left deserted for months or even years. (2)

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

Child based society. Children are indulged and fed on demand. Parents are criticized if their children cry or exhibit signs of unhappiness. Small children often speak vulgarly with no repercussion from parents. Until the age of 6, children play in mixed groups of males and females and often “play house” (1)

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these “other fathers” recognized?

They do not believe in impregnation by the father. The man that the mother is married to at the time is classified as the father (1)

4.14 What is the belief of the mother’s role in procreation exactly? (e.g., “receptacle in which fetus grows”)

The mother is infused with the spirit of a pre-existing spirit child, which causes the mother to become pregnant, and the baby to be born. This spirit child will appear to the mother before conception in the form of an animal; which is commonly recognized as a conception totem. The spirit child is then believed to grow in the womb by sustaining itself with nutrients. (1)

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?

It is not believed to be incremental, but it is believed that the spirit child will appear to the mother in the form of a totem prior to conception (1)

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape: I could not find anything relating to rape

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin)

Ideal marriage is a classificatory cross-cousin. But these individuals should be genealogically and geographically distant. Sister exchange is possible but rare since they prefer a long term form of reciprocity. The BM or FZH who removes the youth’s foreskin is likely to reciprocate (after “killing him”) with a daughter for the youth. (1)

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

Sex is regarded as a normal part of life. However, adults attempt to have as much privacy with sexual activities as possible (1)

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring: N/A because usually polygyny will occur

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

Close coresident relatives such as siblings and grandparents typically raise children (1)

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females

4.22 Evidence for couvades: N/A

4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older) N/A

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?

It is thought that some interaction must be limited such as: “behavior such as touching, joking, the direct passing of objects hand to hand, sitting together, visiting another’s camp, calling by name, looking directly at another member while talking, and arguing with or physically assaulting any members of certain kin categories” (1)

4.24 Joking relationships?

“rowdy exchanges of sexually explicit epithets and mock abuse, with much body contact and sexual horseplay, which amuse onlookers at least as much as the joking pair” (1) This type of joking usually occurs in same sex kin relationships.

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations

“The Mardu kinship system is bilateral, but traditionally there was a clear patrilineal tendency in “residence” rules and practices, as well as a strong preference for children to be born somewhere in or near the estate of their father. Both the estate group and the band tended to have a core of people related patrilineally. There were no lineages or clans, and genealogical depth was limited (aided by taboos on naming the dead)” (2)

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

Cross cousin that Mardudjara marry are generally related distantly (1)

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

A marriage takes place when the parents of a man's betrothed send her to his camp and the couple then cohabits on a permanent basis-there is no marriage ceremony among the desert people (3 and 1)

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?

- Kinship terminology is a bifurcate merging system which occurs within the four categories of society. (1)
 “Distinguish between terms of address and reference and also relative age (oldest, middle, and youngest)” (1)
- 4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)
 Marriage is preferred to be within the community (1 and 2)
- 4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?
 Usually the mother’s brother arranges a daughter (cross cousin) for the son to marry (1)
 Sister exchange is very rare but possible since they prefer a long-term form of reciprocity (1)
 The BM or FZH who removes the foreskin during the circumcision ritual is likely to reciprocates with the gift of a daughter after the procedure (1)
 Girls could be promised to men as early as a few months of age (3)
- 4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:
 Eloping is frowned upon- the couple may be killed if they try to elope and marry someone without consulting the elders (1)

Warfare/homicide- I did not find anything on warfare. The only reference that mentioned warfare is “ ... observed very low levels of violence from the Mardudjara, who had no word for feud or warfare” (4 and 1)

- 4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:
 4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:
 4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:
 4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):
 4.18 Cannibalism?
 They fear cannibalism of the neighboring tribe the “Ngayunangalgu” which lives next to Lake Disappointment (1)

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

- 5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:
 Bands of 15-20 people traditionally. Currently there is a village (jigalong) of 1000 residents (1)
- 5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):
 Traditionally, Mardudjara were very mobile, moving with the resources that the desert had to offer. Though they generally stayed in the Western side of the desert. Usually, the presence of water was the deciding factor to where the Mardudjara resided (1)
- 5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):
 There are many groups consisting of a Linguistic Unit, Estate group, and the band. Tonkin explains these social constructions in his book. (1)
 Linguistic Unit: People do not identify themselves as the Mardudjara- they name themselves after a particular watering hole or meeting spot where the group of peoples often congregates (1)
 Estate Group: “Each linguistic group is composed of a number of estate groups whose members are dispersed in a number of bands. Membership in an estate can be a result of birth, conception, circumcision, and father’s birth. The more ties of this nature, the stronger the attachment to the estate.” (1)
- 5.4 Post marital residence:
 Patriarchal society, reside with the husband after marriage (usually there is a large age gap between husband and wife) (1)
- 5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):
 No active defense, very peaceful people. (3)
- 5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):
- 5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:
 Kinship behavior ranges from complete avoidance to uninhibited joking (“rowdy exchanges of sexually explicit epithets and mock abuse, with much body contact and sexual horseplay, which amuse onlookers at least as much as the joking pair” (p. 47). Usually reserved for same-sex kin. (1)
- 5.8 Village and house organization:
 In small bands, each family has their own fire and often the bachelors will set up camp (1)
- 5.9 Specialized village structures (mens’ houses): N/A because permanent structures were not implemented- often shacks, lean to’s or holes in the ground (1)
- 5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?
 The area is usually cleaned and burned; to get rid of possible insects before camp is set up. Often, lean to’s are constructed and depressions are made for sleeping arrangement. (1)
- 5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:
 See political System. The people who are in charge and make the decisions are also the people who have the most prominent social status
- 5.12 Trade:
 Organized trading networks were absent in the Western Desert, however, some very valuable items were traded between groups (usually for religious purposes or ceremony). These items are: pearl shells, red ocher. (2)
- 5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

- 6.0 Time allocation to RCR: I could not find specific time allocation to RCR

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

“*Mabarn*. Men who use magic for socially approved ends and inherit these skills from their fathers. Their distinctiveness lies in their possession of psychic powers, special skills, and knowledge that gives them greater access to the spiritual realm. People rely on them for the treatment of chronic or worrisome illnesses.” (1)

“*Mabarn* do their work by using an “x-ray examination” of individuals to discover the location and type of object doing harm and remove it with manipulation, pounding, or massaging the victim’s body. They are also used to recover missing objects, protect individuals from spiritual attack, predict events, and explain unusual phenomena. Although they usually work alone they sometimes join forces to deal with difficult issues or issues that effect the community.” (1)

They are not identified with higher standing in the community (1)

6.2 Stimulants:

No stimulants noted. Western culture introduced alcohol, which has made the Mardu a little more lax about some traditions, but overall they remain one of the most traditional bands of aborigines. (1)

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):

There are many rituals concerning the development of boys into men. They are listed as follows (1)

Tooth Evulsion: At ages 10-12 boys have their front teeth knocked out with a chisel

Nose Piercing: The septum is pierced in some bands and a bone is inserted

Circumcision: recognized as a rite of passage and activists in the community are there to comfort to young man after the process has taken place. Please note: Many marriages are circumcision marriages

There are also many stages that coincide with the circumcision ritual which is the final ritual of manhood. The stages are as follows(1)

Seizure: for 6-8 weeks the boy may not speak and is not spoken to. This is because he is rendered spiritually “dead”

Trip: The youths travel to let neighboring bands know about their upcoming rite. They also travel to learn the lay of the land

The Arrival and Prelim Circumcision: the camp is made ready for the ritual and the neighboring bands arrive

The Operation: boy is circumcised and must eat the foreskin without chewing

Seclusion: boys must stay in camp and are joined by men, but they still cannot speak since they are still “dead”

Return: The boys go hunting and bring food to camp where they join society as men, they are covered in blood which represents the blood of birth

Betrothal: The mother’s brother gives the new man a girl child whom he is encouraged to take care of. A subincision (required by law) is performed later.

6.4 Other rituals:

Rites are designed to help with fertility of land (1)

The *Mabarn* usually perform sorcery on neighboring groups. They employ malevolent spirits called *marblu* to perform the sorcery for them (1)

“*Songlines*. Songs have both mythological and geographic references and highlights the mundane and extraordinary exploits of Dreamtime beings. In memorizing these songs men become familiar with hundreds of sites they have never visited.” (1)

6.5 Myths (Creation):

It is believed that there was a stage of Dreamtime in which the world was created by beings who were part human and part animal. Dreamtime is also believed to be a reservoir of knowledge and power. Humans may be able to tap into this knowledge and power through rituals. They believe that there were two types of creators of Dreamtime- the travelers and the homebodies- and wherever they went they left the future power for spirit children to be born. After the creators “died” and their activities on earth were finished, their remains created certain natural elements in the desert. (rocks, sands, trees, etc) (1)

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

“Most artistic endeavor was confined to religious contexts and entailed the manufacture of sacred objects, body decorations, and ground paintings. The making of weapons and other artifacts for sale to Whites has been an informal and minor part of the local economy for several decades” (2)

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

“Men controlled the most powerful, inner secrets, and ritual performance was believed to ensure the continuance of society, under the watchful eyes of all-powerful, but withdrawn, spiritual beings” (2)

“Virtually all Mardu people participate in religious practice” (2)

“Men are convinced that there are spiritual forces too powerful and dangerous for anyone other than themselves to deal with.” (1)

Women participate in religious ceremony and are essential, yet peripheral compared to a man’s role in religion (1)

6.8 Missionary effect:

“A small minority of the Mardu possesses Christian beliefs, but none to the exclusion of the traditional religion” (2)

6.9 RCR revival: N/A because culture remains unchanged throughout time

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

“Main concern is that the spirit of the dead find a permanent home in the afterlife such that it does not interfere with the living with whom it wants to remain.” (1)

“Upon death there is emotional wailing by both sexes and attempts to inflict scalp wounds on themselves. An Activist relative will carry the body out of camp to bury it and the camp will be abandoned.” (1)

“The dead person’s name is not uttered again and those with similar sounding names are renamed. During a two year mourning certain game animals are taboo. Then the bounds are removed from the grave and brought to the widow and then reburied” (1)

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

No taboo of naming dead people, but it is customary to bury the dead and then move camp to a completely different area until the spirit has successfully passed into the other world (this can take months or years) (1 &2)

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

“In daily address or reference, kin terms are used, rarely personal names, and tekynonymy is common along with section names” (1)

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.)

It is believed that as long as the people follow the Laws of Dreamtime, the creators would continue to release life onto the land and the people. Totems were considered very important as a connection to the Dream world and also considered a part of individuality. (2)

They are also very reluctant to travel to new places since the spirits in those places are different and will not know the people as well (2)

7. Adornment- Adornment was a category that I could not find much about, I think this is because adornment is usually functional, i.e; used to protect the skin from harsh elements or ritualistic. There is not ceremonial marriage adornment which eliminates the possible use of flashy items. Also, whenever I tried to find adornment in general, I found things relating to aborigines as a whole, not specifically the Mardudjara people.

7.1 Body paint:

Mud is often used as a tool for decoration and also to keep the wearer cool in the desert heats and unsavory weather (5)

7.2 Piercings:

Septum piercing during manhood ritual (1)

7.3 Haircut:

7.4 Scarification:

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

During Dreamtime rituals, men become adorned/ painted to celebrate (1)

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

7.8 Missionary effect:

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

8.2 Sororate, levirate: N/A

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

Ideal marriage is a classificatory cross cousin- but these should be distantly related. Often BM or FZH chooses the match that is to be married (1)

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

1. Infanticide is common if: (1)

a. The child is deformed

b. Comes too soon after an older sibling (too short of an inter-birth interval)

c. The mother is in a weakened condition

Numbered references

1. The Mardudjara Aborigines: Living the dream in Australia’s Desert, Robert Tonkinson
2. Everyculture.com
3. Nebraska Anthropology Department
4. Whitewash: On Keith Windschuttles Fabrication of Aboriginal History
5. Savages and Civilization by Jack Weatherford