

## 1. Description

- 1.1 Name of society, language, and language family: Mehinaku. Alternative names: Mehinako. Arawak language family. Mehinaku language. (2)
- 1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): 639 (1)
- 1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): approximately 12.5 degrees South, 54 degrees West (3)
- 1.4 Brief history:
- 1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:
  - 1.6 Ecology: The Mehinaku village is in a low-lying Basin off a tributary of the Xingu River called the Tuatuari River. They exploit a line of trees near the river, a floodplain, and past that, a dense forest. This area goes through seasonal changes that range from a dry season when rivers are very low to a wet season when rivers are overflowing and the land is swampy (3)
  - 1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density: There used to be two villages, but one remains. As of 1976, there were 77 individuals living in 6 houses. Tribes were very dispersed in this area so boundaries for home range are not unanimously defined. However, there is a clear distinction between resource rich areas for them and other tribes. Aerial pictures show the village area to be about a two mile radius. (3)

## 2. Economy

- 2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): Manioc, fruits like pequi and mangaba (3)
- 2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: fish is most important, but they also eat monkeys and birds (3)
- 2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns? : a vegetal poison called Timbo, (3)
- 2.4 Food storage: maize is stored in the rafters of houses, manioc flour (3)
- 2.5 Sexual division of production: Women collect manioc and carry it back to the village to process into flour. They also care for the children, cook the meals, spin cotton or twine cord, and make hammocks. Men have more freedom in their routine. They tend the gardens, but they now have steel tools to do this with, so it is faster. The men hunt, fish, collect medicinal roots, make bows, arrows, and canoes. Men and women tend to individual garden plots together. All the men and women of one residence share the responsibility to care for the house, including things like weeding, sweeping, maintaining the house (3)
- 2.6 Land tenure:
- 2.7 Ceramics:
  - 2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns: When a man obtains protein, it is distributed throughout the house, as well as to the "true kinsman" (see 8.3) of the man and of his wife. This is standard practice, although you will also see food sharing for friends, sexual partners, during rituals, and for hospitable purposes. (3)
- 2.9 Food taboos: deer, wild pig, tapir and paca are under taboo during seclusions. (2)
- 2.10 Canoes/watercraft? Men build canoes. These are especially useful during the rainy season. (2)

## 3. Anthropometry

- 3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):
- 3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

## 4. Life History, mating, marriage

- 4.1 Age at menarche (f):
- 4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):
- 4.3 Completed family size (m and f):
  - 4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f): About two and a half (3)
  - 4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):
- 4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: No evidence for divorce. (3)
- 4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: No evidence for polygyny. (3)
- 4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?: There are two types of marriage. One type is when a girl is newly adolescent and still in seclusion. In this case, she moves to his family's house to finish her seclusion and there is a large payment to her family. The other type of marriage is less prestigious and does not require as large a payment. (3)
- 4.9 Inheritance patterns:

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict: Parents have a close relationship with their children, and hopefully the children will take care of them when they get old. Also, it is understood that a boy child will have the qualities of the father and vice versa. (3,270) Because of this belief, other people judge the parent by how the child acts. The child is coddled when small and taught everything as they grow. They are also criticized for wrongdoings. As the girl child gets older, she must take on much responsibility to prepare herself. A boy child has much more freedom but will still be criticized for laziness. (3)

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): “essentially endogamous”(3)

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these “other fathers” recognized? partible paternity. (3)

4.14 What is the belief of the mother’s role in procreation exactly? (e.g., “receptacle in which fetus grows”): The mother is only shelter for the fetus. She does not give it nutrients or help it to grow.(3)

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)? It can be one man or more who impregnate the female. He is or they are inserting something into the female which forms the baby. The head is formed first, then the arms, the torso, and the legs. (3)

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape: If a woman enters or is looking into the window of the men’s house, she can be gang raped. (3)

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin): cross-cousin (3)

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?: Yes. The avg. man has 4.4 affairs, but women have a greater range or variation of that number. Although usually the women who are desired for extramarital affairs must be sexually desired, and this is based on age, health, and outward appearance, while almost all men can find a partner for an extramarital affair. (2)

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring: There is almost always gift giving to a female who is acting in an extramarital relationship, such as fish, beads, or soap. (2)

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

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

4.22 Evidence for couvades: The baby will not be given a name for the couvades period and will not be brought into public areas for a year. It is believed that if someone who recently had sex sees the baby, the baby will get sick and die. Also the baby’s soul is not safe from spirits. After birth, the father will be secluded with mother and baby, he will be referred to as “infant’s father, and he will be like the mother. He will take the medicine that she takes. He will also eat the diet that a new mother eats, with the intention of ending her blood flow to avoid hemorrhaging. After her blood flow ends, she has no more restrictions on her own social life, although keeping the baby out of sight usually keeps her out of sight as well. The father however remains in seclusion for six to ten months. (3,271) He must adhere to the food taboos, including: fish, pepper, salt (believed to keep the mother bleeding) while the mother is bleeding and monkey and birds after the mother is done bleeding, sweet foods. (3) This is strictly followed for the first child of the man but there are many other taboos for all subsequent children, including: no killing large animals, catching large fish, chopping down trees, making a garden, obtaining clay, digging holes, heavy housework, building a fence, making salt, having sex, making a basket, making pequi silo, collecting thatch, collecting wood for flutes, making black wood bows, making uruca pigment, making a headdress, and being associated with the spirit of a bullroarer. (3).

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

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect? Husband and wife must show signs of kinship and respect when first married, for example, they must bathe together, share utensils, use kin terms, and sleep in adjacent hammocks. Along with these displays of respect to each other, they must show the same respect to their in-laws as well. To the parents and siblings of an individual’s wife, he must show respect and be shameful in their presence. There is a taboo on contact and name usage between a new husband and his wife’s parents. (3)

4.24 Joking relationships?: Cross cousins (3)

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations: Bilateral kinship which is reflected in the belief that many men can be the father of one baby who comes from one mother. (3)

4.26 Incest avoidance rules: No evidence for specific rules but it is looked down upon. (3)

- 4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony? In secondary marriage, which refers to a woman being married who is not newly a woman, it is officiated by a bride's kinsmen carrying his hammock to the her house. This is noted by people who see it, but nothing official happens.(3)
- 4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?
- 4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?): Marriage is usually within the community. (3)
- 4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)? It seems that individuals choose who they marry. The nature of Mehinkau kin is that once a man is married, they will almost choose who their "kin" from the wife's family are and who are not.(3)
- 4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

### **Warfare/homicide**

- 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):MEhinaku have trade relations with other Xingu groups but not other Indians. In the past this is true. Today many of the war-like tribes that were avoided have been pacified and there has even been trade between these groups. (3)
- 4.18 Cannibalism?

### **5. Socio-Political organization and interaction**

- 5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:There is only one village at this time and it consist of 85 people. (3)
- 5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): seasonal, with the floods and droughts. They also use slash and burn agriculture, which is managed much easier when mobile. (2)
- 5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): There is a chief who descends from previous chiefs and is initiated into this position by a ritual. There are individuals that are of the common people who are called miyeipyenuwanti, which translates to "trash yard people" . These individuals are considered as trash people for social reasons, such as they have inappropriate sexual relations. (3)
- 5.4 Post marital residence: Post-marital residence is very flexible. If possible, the husband will live with the wife's parents until they have so many children, then he will return to his home for good. Most of the time, it is just the preference of the couple and the parents. (3)
- 5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):
- 5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex): There is a smoking circle that only shamans/males are permitted to join held each evening. There is one female shaman, but if she joins the circle, she will sit behind her husband. While they are circled up, they speak of news of the day. While people can move nearer to the circle to listen, they may not join. (2)
- 5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships: cross cousins (3)
- 5.8 Village and house organization: The village lies between Tuatari River and Culiseu River. The main trail, which runs in opposite directions and cuts through the village, lines up with the path that the sun takes across the sky. There is a center plaza which includes one house. The other houses are in a circle around the open plaza. Behind the outside circle of houses lay the "trash yards" where daily household activities are performed. Gardens are located in different areas outside of the trash yard circle. The house in the middle of the plaza is the men's house and it is built to bisect the main trail and the sun's path. Chief's houses are located near the main paths. All other houses are made to be opposite another within the circle. (3) There are two different types of standard houses built. The houses are up to 100 ft. long, thirty feet wide, and thirty feet high. The front door is made to face the plaza in the middle and the rear door to the trash yard is opposite it. There are two benches by each door, a table in the middle along with a mortar and manioc griddle. Off to each side of this oval shaped house is the areas that contain the hammocks along with a hearth on each side. (3)
- 5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):
- 5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?: Sleep in hammocks (3) While the household is made up of several nuclear families that are not socially differentiated for the most part, everyone in residence respects the different areas which includes the hammocks and belongings of each nuclear family within the dwelling. (3)

- 5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: There is no mention of clans or moieties. Mehinaku are mostly endogamous, and this is controlled by keeping track of the lineages, in some manner. Kin relations can virtually made up, if need be, to facilitate resource exchange.(3)
- 5.12 Trade: The Mehinaku have traded with other tribes who are not very war-like for a long time. Only recently have they begun to trade with other tribes, but they are not happy to do it. It is only done because the items to trade are so worth having, and they are not hospitable as usual to these groups when they come to the Mehinaku village. They have a near monopoly on salt and cotton.(3)
- 5.13 Indications of social hierarchies? There is a difference in wealth between individuals. There are possessions that are seen as a measurement of wealth, such as belts, beads, headdresses, etc. If someone has much of these, they are wealthy. Someone else can have more possessions, but possessions that are seen as lesser, and that person will not be as wealthy. Individuals share their wealth quite a bit, but they will be clever about how it is shared to benefit themselves. (3)

## **6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)**

6 Time allocation to RCR:

- 6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): Shamans. Shamans can help to cure illness, communicate with the spirits, (3)
- 6.2 Stimulants: only evidence for tobacco. Smoking and shamanism go hand in hand.(3)
- 6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal): One puberty ritual for boys is the seclusion for up to three years, with breaks, before they become a man. There is also a piercing ritual for boys which is correlated with the ritual for women who are starting their menstruation. There are intertribal rituals for death. What all birth, death, adolescence rituals have in common is seclusion. At birth a child is secluded together with his parents for several months to a year. An adolescent girl is secluded for three years beginning with her first menses. An adolescent boy is secluded for three years beginning at 12 or younger, but it is in intervals. New fathers are secluded for a year and new mothers are secluded until their bleeding stops. With the death of a spouse an individual will have their head shaved and be in seclusion for up to a year. With all of these there are food taboos and adornment with uruca paint(3)
- 6.4 Other rituals: One ritual is concerned with spirits and their relation to humans. They give presents and food to the spirits to avoid sickness. There are many rituals that involve spirits. To become a shaman you must go into seclusion for about three months. (3)
- 6.5 Myths (Creation): The distant past is called ekwimyatipa. The sun created the landscape, the people and the culture. The sun made interconnecting rivers and streams by breaking a container of water over the headwaters of the basin. He then shot arrows to the ground, which represent the different tribes of the Xingu and he gave them all that they have now. They also have separate myths which apply to males and females. Females were made out of wood, before men arrived. (2)
- 6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): Men often have wrestling matches in which they pain themselves with charcoal and urucu paint. (3)
- 6.7 Sex differences in RCR: mostly only men can become a shaman. (3)
- 6.8 Missionary effect:
- 6.9 RCR revival:
- 6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:
- 6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?: Taboo on naming dead people, specifically people who have died in the past 3 years; but naming any ancestors is avoided. (3)
- 6.12 Is there teknonymy?: A new baby will be called by teknonymous names during the couvade (for the first year of life) (3)
- 6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.): They do invest much in their belief in witches, so some magic is involved. Their religion is centered around the belief in spirits. (2)

## **7. Adornment**

- 7.1 Body paint: For special occasions, such as wrestling matches. Bodies are painted with red pigment called uruca. (3) The first step is to cover the body in oil from pequi fruit. Next the area that will be painted on is covered with charcoal. Then the paint is applied by hand or with a small wooded stylus. (3) Women: uruca is only used for a line across the forehead and to cover feet, lower shins, and ankles. Another red dye called epitsiri and a black paint made of charcoal and oil are put on the arms and legs. The design can be a polka dot design, a diamond-shaped design, or an anaconda design. (3)

7.2 Piercings: Ear piercing for boys, along with a ritual, at 7-12 years of age. (3)

7.3 Haircut: Men: Hair is worn in straight bowl cut. The hair is designed with geometric designs using red pigment called uruca. There are many different designs that can be used and some represent different social roles and statuses. (3) Women: Hair is worn long and straight. (3)

7.4 Scarification: When children are in trouble, scarification with a fish-tooth scraper will be used. (3)

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.): Men: arm and leg bands made of soft cotton rope and bark fiber, ankle shield made of bark fiber, belts made of shell traded from Carib-speaking tribes, large Brazilian beads, or cotton, necklaces made of jaguar claws and shells traded with Carib-speaking tribes, red and yellow feather earrings, and a feather headdress which is a round woven form, feather down which ties around the form, and a crown of feathers which are vertically erect. (3, 157) Women: belt made of twine wound about the waist in loop designs, leg bands and necklaces. (3, 162:165)

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment: The above adornment is worn on many occasions as well as for ritual. (3)

7.7 Sex differences in adornment: Women adorn themselves with fewer items than men. (3)

7.8 Missionary effect:

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

## **8. Kinship systems**

8.1 Sibling classification system: Siblings and parallel cousins (ego's same sex sibling's kids) are all called by the same terms, nutai and nitsupalu. Parallel cousins and siblings then, have a special relationship. When they are young, they are together a lot, but as they grow older, their relationship becomes more formal.

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.): Mehinaku believe in a relation to someone if they share an ancestor ("true kinsmen") and if no ancestor is shared there is no relation ("just people"). However there are different relations between the two. Epenewaja is used for people that are thought to be related, as well as for individuals who like each other or who exchange food and labor. Epenehatai means that the relation is thought to be there but cannot be for sure. This is used for everyone in the village who is not kin. Peneri means that there is definitely no relation but a tie needs to be made for social reasons, and this can extend to individuals in different tribes. Eventually the kids of their kids will be a higher connection of kin. The last connection is no connection at all. This is for individuals in different tribes, in the case that no tie needs to be established. Also, for individuals who are remotely related, they have the choice of whether to acknowledge this or not. (3)

## **9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):**

- Bathe many times a day.
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## **Numbered references**

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3. Gregor, H. (1981). Mehinaku, the drama of daily life in a Brazilian Indian village. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Print.