

1. Description

1.1 Name of society, language, and language family:

Society: Macushi; alternate names include Macusi, Makushi, Makusi, Makuxi, Teueia, Teweya (6) and Macuxi

Language: Macushi

Language Family: Carib (1, p.87)

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

ISO 639:3 mbc (6)

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

The Macushi language is spoken from the Rupununi River in Guyana to the Cotingo and Surumu Rivers in Brazil (1, p.87). Macushi also live in the eastern border area of Venezuela (6). The location in Guyana lies principally between latitudes 3-5 degrees North and longitudes 58-60 degrees West (19, p.314).

1.4 Brief history:

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

The Macushi first came into contact with colonial powers in the 17th century (19, p.315). Conversion efforts were historically made by Christian missionaries (7, p.509).

In recent years, the Macushi, with help from the Catholic church, banded together in Brazil to protect their land from encroaching gold miners and prospectors after a decree by the Brazilian president opened the land up to legal challenges by miners, ranchers, and agribusiness interests (12, p.D10).

1.6 Ecology:

The Rupununi region of southern Guyana is made up of savannah and forest-savannah, with forest islands and gallery forest (5). The region is also bordered by forest-covered mountains (5). There are two rainy seasons: May to August and December to January (5).

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

The Macushi grow cassava, bananas, and sometimes peanuts (5). The cassava is used to make cereal, bread, and a fermented drink called *parakari* (7, p.509). They also grow maize (9, p.269).

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

Hunting and fishing provide the major sources of protein in the diet (5). Game animals include the white-lipped and collared peccaries, lowland tapir, red brocket deer, several species of armadillo, paca, agoutis, and white-tailed deer (5). Fishing is important in the dry seasons, because the fish becomes concentrated in shallows and because game animals become more dispersed (5). However, during the rainy seasons, hunting is the main source of protein because many low-lying areas become flooded, forcing animals to higher ground where they become more concentrated (5). Domesticated animals also sometimes provide a source of protein (5). Beef cattle and sheep are reared as a food source (7, p.509).

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

The Macushi have blowguns and use an arrow poison called curare, which acted as a paralyzing agent (2, p.143). However, in more recent years many have given up blowguns in favor of shotguns (2, p.143). The Macushi also use bows, arrows, and also machetes for hunting (5). When hunting, traps are also used (5).

2.4 Food storage:

Salt is used to preserve meat (4, p.A1).

2.5 Sexual division of production:

Women perform tasks such as weaving, making pottery, and crafting jewelry (4, p.A1; 16, p.9). Hunting is done by both males and females, with a slight majority of hunting done by males (56%) (5). Women are in charge of farms, and horticulture is very labor-intensive for them (19, p.315).

2.6 Land tenure:

The Macushi grow cotton (4, p.A1). The Macushi practice subsistence agriculture (4, p.A1), small-scale swidden agriculture, hunting, fishing, and gathering (5). Farming areas are established in areas of cleared forest and range in size from about 0.5 to 1 hectare per household (5).

2.7 Ceramics:

The Macushi make and sell pottery, which they form from clay found gathered from the mountains (15).

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

Collective labor and feasting are preferred in the community (20, p. 56).

2.9 Food taboos:

The Macushi will not eat the meat of animals that they deem to be *piaiman* (22, p. 16).

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

The Macushi use canoes (5).

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

Overall, adults and children of the Macushi are shorter than their North American counterparts. Among females, 42% are stunted. Among males, 37% are stunted. (19, p.320).

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

Females have a mean body mass index of 24.5 (19, p.321).

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):

On average, a woman's inter-birth-interval is 2.9 +/- 1.6 years (19, p.315).

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

Among the Macushi, marriages among young people and those without children experiences higher rates of divorce. However, after a marriage has endured a year or more or after a child has been born to the couple, marriages are much less likely to end in divorce (11, p. 198).

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

Marriages are monogamous (9, p.269).

4.8 Arranged marriage, bride purchase/service, dowry:

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

Infants are nursed on demand and sleep with their mothers, from whom they nurse throughout the night. Mothers bring their infants with them when they go farming (19, p.315).

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

Many Macushi marry members of other nearby tribal groups such as the Patamuna (8, p.2). The group is exogamous (19, p.315).

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

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

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

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

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

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

The Macushi believe that a menstruating woman can be seduced by a serpent (18, p.191).

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring

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

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

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?

4.24 Joking relationships?

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

The Macushi are patrilineal (19, p.315).

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

The Macushi do not see marriage between cousins as incestuous (9, p.269).

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

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?)

Many Macushi marry outside of the community, with members of other nearby tribal groups such as the Patamuna (8, p.2).

Warfare/homicide

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

The Macushi historically warred with neighboring tribes for land (8, p.227).

In-group deaths have risen in recent times due to the availability of firearms. Quarrels that once were once settled by a fistfight now lead to deaths by gunshot (16, p.9).

Because of their constant battle for land with non-Indigenous groups throughout the 1990's, many Macushi were killed while fighting to preserve their land (16, p.9).

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):

The Macushi of the Rupununi region of Guyana are close neighbors with the Wapishana, and have in the past come together to form associations like the Rupununi Weavers Society (4, p.A1). The two groups share many cultural similarities (5).

The Macushi often intermarry with members of the Patamuna, who are their neighbors in the Guyana Highlands (8, p.2).

In 1999, the nine Indigenous nations of Guyana, including the Macushi, came together to sign a treaty of peace and friendship at the first Indigenous-Organized National Toshias (village leaders) Conference (10).

4.18 Cannibalism?

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

Total population: A total of about 29,100 people speak Macushi, 19,000 of whom live in Brazil, 9,500 in the southwestern border area of Guyana, and 600 in the eastern border area of Venezuela (6).

A study including both Macushi and Wapishana villages of the Rupununi region found that village populations ranged from 60 to 1,200 (5). The largest village, Lethem, contained an ethnically diverse population of about 1,158 (5). Another study found 12 villages to have a total population of 2,800. If these villages were of equal size, each would contain approximately 233 individuals (19, p. 315).

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

The Macushi travel by foot, canoe, and horse. Bicycles are also becoming a popular mode of transportation (5). Villages seem to be permanent.

The death of a very influential member of a village can be cause for village abandonment and migration to a new area (8, p.56).

Those who practice cattle raising rotate their herds of cattle around the different settlements in order to avoid devastating the land (16, p.9).

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):

There are traditional leaders, both male and female, who guide the Macushi tribes. In the mid-1990s when a group of women weavers earned a lot of money by selling their hammocks online, group leaders felt that the weaving group's potential wealth threatened the social structure of the community and took control of the group (4, p.A1).

Village leaders or former chiefs are often also district chairpersons, of elected officials. They form a sort of political class within the Macushi communities (4, p.A1).

There is a chief of all 46 of the Macushi settlements in the Maturuka reserve in Brazil (16, p.9).

5.4 Post-marital residence:

In one story of a battle between the Macushi and the Patamuna, a Macushi man who married a Patamuna woman lived among the Patamuna and led them in the fight (8, p.225).

Extended families often share one home (19, p.315).

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

Although the Guyana Ministry of Amerindian Affairs maintains records of legal title to land, communities have traditionally agreed-upon rules of land use. These rules define where houses can be built and where farming, fishing, hunting, and logging activities are permitted (5). In recent years the Macushi in Brazil have been forced to defend their lands from encroaching ranchers and miners, often leading to fighting and violence (12, p.D10).

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

5.8 Village and house organization:

Houses have dirt floors (4, p.A1). They also have adobe walls and thatched roofs (9, p. 269). Approximately 15 people live in each house (14). Extended families often share one home (19, p.315).

Houses are generally spaced about 100 meters or more apart unless the households contain close family members, in which case the houses may be closer together in proximity (5).

The Macushi generally build their villages in open savannah, but practice farming in nearby forests, usually at least an hour away from the village by foot (19, p.315).

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):

Villages consist of two or more houses built around central courtyards (17, p.26).

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

Women weave hammocks used for sleeping (4, p.A1).

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:

5.12 Trade:

In the 1990s, a group of about 300 women from the Macushi and neighboring Wapishana tribe formed the Rupununi Weavers Association and began selling hammocks over the internet at about \$1000 USD each (4, p.A1).

Because using money to purchase items is a foreign concept to many Macushi Indians, salt is sometimes used as a preferred currency (4, p.A1).

The Macushi also sell other goods, such as clay pots and jewelry, in nearby villages (14, 16, p.9).

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6 Time allocation to RCR:

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

The Macushi have shamans, or *piaiman* (5). These "medicine men" are seen as the operators of magic and possessors of the ability to cause and remove disease (9, p.269). Spirits speak through shamans (12, p.D10).

6.2 Stimulants:

The Macushi make an intoxicating drink called *parakari* (7).

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

There exists no formal puberty rites for either males or females (9, p.269).

At a Macushi burial, relatives bury the body and then lament over it. Next, they each jump over the grave in the direction from which they had come (21, p. 110).

6.4 Other rituals:

6.5 Myths (Creation):

The Macushi believe that they were the descendants of the children of the sun. Their ancestors gave them the gift of fire, but also left them with many troubles, like disease and the hardships of nature (17, p.26).

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

The Macushi use rainsticks, which are a kind of musical instrument made from a raphia palm frond in various ceremonies (3, p.2).

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

6.8 Missionary effect:

6.9 RCR revival:

The Macushi now teach their children the Macushi language as well as with basket-weaving, legends and dances (13).

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

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

The word *kanaimà* refers both to the agent of dark shamanic violence and also to the violence itself. It can harm the body of the victim physically (20, p.58). All community activities, however mundane, are seen as bringing either good or bad fortune and health upon oneself and kin group (20, p.58). *Piyaman* or *piaiman* is light shamanism (20, p.58). Invisible spirits reside in people, plants, animals, and natural elements like water (20, p.58).

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

The Macushi traditionally covered their bodies with dyes (14). The most often-used colors are red and blue-black, with white and yellow used more sparingly (22, p.196).

7.2 Piercings:

Women traditionally pierced one or more holes in their lower lips, which they plugged with a sharpened piece of wood (22, p.193).

Men traditionally pierced one hole just beneath the middle of their lower lip, through which they looped a piece of string with an ornament on the end (22, p.193). Men also pierced their septum, from which they suspended an ornament in the shape of a half-moon (22, p.193).

Both men and women sometimes pierce their ears (22, p.193).

7.3 Haircut:

Hair is traditionally worn at shoulder-length (22, p.189).

7.4 Scarification:

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

The Macushi traditionally used feathers to decorate their bodies (14).

Women traditionally wore great amounts of beads and seeds in ropes around their necks, waists, ankles, wrists, and/or upper arms (22, p.199).

Men traditionally wore a variety of ornaments, feathers, necklaces of teeth, and sometimes a skirt of palm leaves (22, p. 197-9).

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

Historically, females and males both wore very little, but females wore a small, beaded apron and men wore a breech-cloth (9, p.269).

Ceremonial adornment is more often worn or utilized by men (22, p.195).

7.8 Missionary effect:

Many younger members of the Macushi group dress in modern fashions because of their proximity to cities like Georgetown, Guyana, where some attend school (4, p.A1). Most Macushi dress in Western, rather than traditional, clothing (16, p.9).

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

Spousal affines are generally considered a more distant kin (20, p.58).

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

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

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

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