



Cross-cultural studies of gender

You are learning how to...	In the context of...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read, annotate and comment on psychological research studies • Identify and discuss issues that affect the validity of research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Research into cultural variation in gender ○ The nature-nurture debate

Mead (1935) studied gender roles and behaviour in three different tribal societies living close to each other in Papua New Guinea. She spent time with each tribe documenting how they lived their lives day to day. She reported that the tribes differed substantially. The Arapesh put a high value on co-operation. Boys and girls were raised to be gentle and loving. Child-bearing was highly valued and both parents were said to bear the child, not only the mother. The Mundugumor, by contrast were quarrelsome, fierce and arrogant. Both men and women professed to hate the whole idea of pregnancy, birth and child-rearing. Infants and children were treated in a harsh and disdainful manner. In the Tchambuli tribe, the men were regarded as emotional and unfit for making serious decisions. They spent lots of time looking after their appearance whilst the women took care of food gathering, trade and other serious matters. As well as these obvious differences, there were also similarities between the tribes. For example, in all cases (including the Tchambuli) it was the men who went to war when there was conflict with other tribal groups.

Malinowski (1929) studied the Trobriand Islanders. In documenting their sexual behaviour he reported that the Trobriand women were sometimes highly sexually aggressive. Gangs of the women would capture and rape men from other tribes, often quite brutally. They would boast about their conquests and considered these to enhance the reputation of their tribe.

Buss et al (1990) examined the features that women and men look for in potential sexual/romantic/relationship partners. In all of the 37 cultures they compared, women's concerns in finding a mate were dominated by the need for protection and to be provided for economically (e.g. income, status, employment) whilst men's concerns were dominated by physical attractiveness and age. When respondents were asked to rank the qualities they looked for in a mate in order of importance, there was a high level of agreement between members of different cultures.

Notes

Questions

- **What implications do these research findings have for the nature-nurture debate in relation to gender?**
- **What sorts of problems might be faced by researchers who want to investigate cultural variations in gender (or other behaviours)?**
- **How might these problems affect the validity of their research?**