

Wagley's informants could recall a case of a woman who had taken the male role or who preferred sex with another female.

Gregor added a muddled account of conceptions of homosexuality as (1) inconceivable, (2) situational, and (3) forgotten for the Mehinaku of the Xingu River. Soares de Souza asserted the Tupinamba were "addicted to sodomy and do not consider it a shame. . . . In the bush some offer themselves to all who want them." In the upper Amazon, Tessmann found that "while there are no homosexuals with masculine tendencies, there are some with extreme effeminacy. My informants knew of two such instances. One of them wears woman's clothing. . . . [The other] wears man's clothing, but likes to do all the work that is generally done by women. He asked one member of our expedition to address him with a woman's name and not with his masculine name. He lives with a settler and prostitutes himself as the passive partner to the settler's workers. He pays his lovers. He never practices active sexual intercourse." A more extended description of widespread homosexual play and of fairly-enduring but "open" relationships is provided by Sorenson: "Young men sit around enticingly sedate and formal in all their finery, or form troupes of panpipe-playing dancers." Occasional sex is regarded as expectable behavior among friends; one is marked as nonfriendly—enemy—if he does not join, especially in the youth 'age group' (roughly 15–35). Homosexual activity was limited neither to within an "age group" nor to unmarried men. Moreover, inter-village homosexuality was encouraged and some "best friends" relationships developed. That the "best friend" is more likely later to marry a sister of his "best friend" is implied in Sorenson's report.

Some of the denials that homosexual behavior among "my people" is "really homosexuality" say more about the observer than the observed. In other cases, denials of what can be observed come from natives. In such cases, it is

difficult to know whether the concern that imputations of accepting homosexuality will stigmatize their tribe are the result of Western acculturation or more venerable cultural concerns.

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AMAZONS, AMERICAN INDIAN

A distinct gender role for masculine females was accepted in many American Indian tribes of North and South America. This role often included a marriage between such a female and a woman. Though sometimes mistakenly referred to by anthropologists as "female berdaches," this term historically was applied only to males and does not account for the special character of the amazon role. Even though the Indians did not live in separate all-female societies, the earliest historic references to such masculine females referred to them as "amazons" rather than as "berdaches," and the Portuguese explorers

in northeastern Brazil named the large river there the River of the Amazons after the female warriors of the Tupinamba Indians.

The extent to which this gender role was socially accepted in aboriginal cultures is unclear, owing to the lack of attention paid to women in the male-written documents of the early European explorers. It is also unclear to what extent these females were "gender-crossers" who were accepted as men, or as "gender mixers" who combined elements of masculinity and femininity with some other unique traits to become an alternative gender. There was probably variation between tribes and among individuals.

Such females were noted for their masculine interests from early childhood, and as adults they often famed for their bravery as warriors and skill as hunters. In some tribes, parents who had no son would select a daughter to raise as a hunter, and this child would grow up to do all the roles of a man, including the taking of a woman as a wife. The amazon's avoidance of sex with a man would protect her from pregnancy, and thus insure her continued activity as a hunter. Kaska Indians of the western Canadian subarctic explained that if such a female had sex with a man, her luck in finding game would be destroyed. Her sexual affairs and marriage with a woman were the accepted form.

Some tribes, like the Mohave, held the view that the true father of a child was the last person to have sex with the mother before the baby's birth. This meant that an amazon would easily claim paternity to the child of her wife, if this wife had been previously impregnated by a man. Therefore, these marriages between an amazon and a woman were socially recognized with their children as families.

Because of their uniqueness, amazons often had the reputation for spiritual power and a gift of prophesy. This was sometimes shared by another form of female gender variance among Plains tribes, known as Warrior Women. Here, women

would sometimes participate in male occupations on the hunt or in warfare, but this did not imply an alternative gender role since they continued to be defined as women. Still, there were some amazons on the Plains, the most famous of which was Woman Chief, a leader of the Crow Indians in the nineteenth century. She was the third highest ranked warrior in her tribe, and was married to four women.

For those who were socially defined as women, it was more important that they reproduce the population than that they be exclusively heterosexual. Motherhood was highly valued, and a woman's status was usually related to her role as a mother more than as a wife. As long as a woman had children, to whom she was married was of less concern to society. Since the amazon was not seen as feminine, and was not socially defined as a woman, she was able to gain status based on her hunting and military abilities.

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AMAZONS, CLASSICAL

Greek mythology includes references to a legendary race of female warriors. Homer's *Iliad* offers only scanty indications of them, and the name given to them is *antianeirai*, later interpreted as "man-hating" or "man-like." The main features of the later Greek Amazon legend are as follows. Coming from the east, they founded a commonwealth of women in the northeast of Asia Minor on the Ther-