

# A Cross-Cultural Study of Female Initiation Rites

JUDITH K. BROWN\*

Rochester, Michigan

THIS study attempts to answer two important questions concerning initiation rites for girls. First, why are these ceremonies observed in some societies and omitted in others? Second, how can the variation in the rites from society to society be accounted for? Although much has been written about the initiation of girls, these two crucial questions have remained unanswered. A thorough review of the literature is impossible here; however, a few of the more outstanding works deserve mention.

Early in this century, Van Gennep (1909) placed initiation rites in context with all other aspects of the life cycle. His ordered approach to the subject and his terminology have had a lasting influence. Frazer (1913) and Crawley (1927) dealt with initiation ceremonies only tangentially, using extensive cross-cultural documentation to support their ideas. Unfortunately they did not evaluate their sources and remained silent on those societies that do not observe such ceremonies. The approach of Van Waters (1913-14) to female initiation rites was descriptive rather than theoretical. She nevertheless appreciated the complexity of her subject, noting that rites vary in elaborateness and that they are not universally practiced.

Some more recent anthropological writers, such as Benedict (1946) and Read (1960), have made provocative speculations about female initiation rites; others, such as Ford and Beach (1951) and DuBois (1932), have limited themselves to descriptive studies. No doubt the most complete and outstanding work is that of Richards (1956). She devoted a large part of her book, *Chisungu*, to what is probably the most detailed description ever made of a girls' initiation ceremony. She analyzed the rite in terms of expressed purpose, but she did not stop at this level of interpretation. She studied the symbolic explanations of many of the details of the rite, and the emotional attitudes associated with various parts of the complex ceremony. She related the main elements of the rite to other institutions of the society and to the underlying tribal dogma which all of these express. Though offering many valuable insights, the relationships suggested by Richards are frequently too subtle to be tested cross-culturally. Other ethnographic accounts are not detailed enough to make such tests possible.

Another group of writers has studied female initiation rites from a psychoanalytic point of view. It is curious that their works usually deal only with those rites involving some form of genital mutilation, as such ceremonies are extremely rare. Freud (1918) himself wrote a paper on ritual defloration. Winterstein (1928), Bryk (1931), Bonaparte (1950), and Bettelheim (1954) all used very inadequate ethnographic documentation for their elaborate

\* I would like to thank Professor and Mrs. John W. M. Whiting for their help with the research here presented.

theories. Even more unfortunate is their attempt to explain these rare ceremonies on the basis of universal human needs.

#### FEMALE INITIATION RITES DEFINED

A female initiation rite is here defined as follows: it consists of one or more prescribed ceremonial events, mandatory for all girls of a given society, and celebrated between their eighth and twentieth years. The rite may be a cultural elaboration of menarche, but it should not include betrothal or marriage customs. This limitation excludes a number of observances which often occur at adolescence but which are of a different nature from those to be considered here. A rite which meets the above specifications is not excluded if it happens to be celebrated for both sexes. However, the definition does exclude those societies that celebrate rites only for certain girls (e.g., aristocrats) and those societies in which the rites are optional and hence not universal. Such rites would not be characteristic of the society as a whole and would therefore not be related to other variables characteristic of the entire society. It is possible that such non-mandatory rites and rites celebrated only for aristocrats are the remainders of ceremonies once observed by all girls of the society, but the investigation of this idea is beyond the scope of the present study. The above definition also eliminates those societies in which menarche brings with it certain new duties and/or privileges but is not attended by specific ritual observances, as well as those societies in which menarche is observed in the same way subsequent menstruations are. Such occurrences, although coincident with adolescence, must be considered as part of the society's menstrual customs and, as such, are related to other antecedents than the phenomena of interest here. (See Stephens 1959).

#### THE RESEARCH METHOD

In this study the test statistic  $\chi^2$  is used. Two precautions against lack of independence among the societies of the sample are observed. First, an attempt is made to select cultures from areas widely separated geographically. Fifty-five of Murdock's (1957) 60 culture areas of the world are represented in the sample. (The five which are omitted are Near East, Caucasia, Eastern Melanesia, Eastern Polynesia, and Central Mexico.) Furthermore, when more than one society has been selected from the same culture area, care is taken that they differ in language, basic economy, descent and/or political integration (Laboratory of Human Development n.d.) One can assume that societies which are dissimilar in these characteristics are less likely to have had a recent common origin.

A second problem in the selection of the sample is more difficult. It was necessary to select societies on which ethnographic accounts are sufficiently complete to obtain ratings on as many of the relevant variables as possible. The sample is therefore biased. Preference was given to those societies, ethnographies of which offered good information regarding the adolescent life of girls. Preference was also given to those societies on which ratings of the antecedent variables had been made.

The ethnographic accounts of over 100 societies were studied. Due to the

difficulties described above, only 75 of these societies are included in the final sample. These societies are shown on Table 1, arranged according to Murdock's geographical areas. The presence or absence of rites is also indicated.

TABLE 1. THE SAMPLE ARRANGED ACCORDING TO MURDOCK'S "WORLD ETHNO-GRAPHIC SAMPLE" SHOWING ABSENCE (—) AND PRESENCE (\*) OF RITES

AFRICA (14)		INSULAR PACIFIC (10)	
Hottentot	*	Bontoc	—
Thonga	*	Tarongans	—
Bemba	*	Balinese	—
Lamba	*	Alorese	—
Gusii	*	Aranda	*
Ganda	*	Kiwai	*
Dahomeans	*	Ifaluk	*
Mende	*	Buka	*
Mossi	*	Lesu	*
Tallensi	—	Pukapukans	*
Fulani	—	NORTH AMERICA (13)	
Azande	—	Naskapi	*
Dilling	—	Copper Eskimo	—
Nuer	—	Tlingit	*
CIRCUM-		Yurok	*
MEDITERRANEAN (9)		Tubatulabal	*
Somali	—	Paiute	*
Hausa	—	Sanpoil	*
Teda	*	Cheyenne	*
Egyptians	—	Ojibwa	*
French	—	Iroquois	*
Americans	—	Chiricahua	*
Lapps	—	Navaho	*
Bulgarians	—	Papago	*
Rwala	—	SOUTH AMERICA (16)	
EAST EURASIA (13)		Cuna	*
Kazak	—	Cagaba	*
Ainu	—	Goajiro	*
Samoyed	—	Carib	*
Japanese	—	Mundurucu	*
Lepcha	—	Chama	*
Bhil	—	Jivaro	*
Rajput	—	Yagua	*
Toda	—	Aymara	—
Andamanese	*	Cayapa	—
Tanala	—	Araucanians	—
Burmese	*	Tehuelche	*
Khasi	—	Choroti	*
Thai	*	Nambicuara	*
		Timbira	—
		Tupinamba	*
		<i>Total = 75</i>	

TABLE 2. THE RELATIONSHIP OF RESIDENCE AFTER MARRIAGE TO  
FEMALE INITIATION RITES

Residence after Marriage	Rites Absent	Rites Present
Bilocal	Cayapa	Andamanese Goajiro Lamba Naskapi Tlingit Tubatulabal
Matrilocal	Bontoc Khasi Timbira	Bemba Buka Burmese Chama <sup>o</sup> Cheyenne Chiricahua Choroti <sup>o</sup> Cuna Ifaluk Iroquois Jivaro Mundurucu Navaho Ojibwa Paiute Thai
Neolocal	Ainu Americans Egyptians French Hausa Lapps Toda	Cagaba Carib <sup>a</sup> Ganda Lesu
Patrilocal	Alorese Araucanians Aymara Azande Balinese Bhil Bulgarians	Aranda Dahomeans Gusii Hottentot Kiwai Mende Mossi

$\chi^2 = 12.67$  ( $p < .001$ )

<sup>a</sup> Matrilocal alternative.

<sup>b</sup> Bilocal alternative.

<sup>o</sup> Ratings by Murdock used.

TABLE 2—Continued

Residence after Marriage	Rites Absent	Rites Present
	Copper Eskimo	Nambicuara
	Dilling <sup>c</sup>	Papago
	Fulani <sup>c</sup>	Pukapukans <sup>b</sup>
	Japanese	Sanpoil <sup>a</sup>
	Kazak	Teda <sup>c</sup>
	Lepcha	Tehuelche
	Nuer	Thonga
	Rajput	Tupinamba <sup>b</sup>
	Rwala	Yagua
	Samoyed	
	Somali	
	Tallensi	
	Tanala	
	Tarongans	
Not Ascertained		Yurok

## THE RELATIONSHIP OF RITES TO RESIDENCE AFTER MARRIAGE

It is here hypothesized that female initiation rites will occur in those societies in which the young girl continues to reside in the home of her mother after marriage. The purpose of the rites appears to be an announcement of status change both to the initiate and to those around her, made necessary because she spends her adult life in the same setting as her childhood. Richards (1956:128-129) recognized this function of the initiation of the Bemba:

An intelligent *nacimbusa* [mistress of ceremonies] will admit that the girls know how to cook and grind but will say that after her *chisungu* [initiation rite] a young girl does her work in a different way. Such women explain that, when young, a girl can idle in the garden if she likes and her mother will shrug her shoulders and say "She is not grown up." . . . As one woman put it: "Before, if they were called to work they could go slowly. Now they have to run." In other words, the girl is told that she has to do things with a new spirit and a new sense of responsibility. . . . It seems likely therefore that these rites are the means by which the girl publicly accepts her new legal role.

Such rites will not be celebrated in those societies in which the young girl will leave her home and move to that of her husband's family, or to a new home removed from both families. The move itself serves to emphasize the status change to the young girl, and those among whom she will live will think of her as an adult, never having known her as a child.

Judgments on residence after marriage are here based on ratings made at the Laboratory of Human Development (D'Andrade and Whiting n.d.). Societies that are matrilocal are those in which the married daughter continues to live in the same domestic unit with her mother. Furthermore, in those societies that practice bilocal marriage, the young girl will continue to live in the same domestic unit with her mother 50 per cent of the time. These societies

would also be predicted to celebrate female initiation rites. Those societies in which the young girl leaves the domestic unit of her mother at marriage would be those in which she moves to the home of her husband (patrilocal societies), or those in which she and her husband set up a new home away from the domestic units of both families (neolocal societies).

The hypothesis can now be stated in a testable form. Those societies in which the young girl remains in the domestic unit with her mother 50 per cent or more of the time are predicted to celebrate female initiation rites. Those societies in which the young girl leaves the domestic unit of her mother at marriage would not be predicted to observe these ceremonies.

A test of this hypothesis appears on Table 2. It can be seen that the findings are in the expected direction, and are more significant than the .001 level. An examination of those societies which do not confirm the hypothesis is in itself revealing. The Timbira, which are matrilocal, but do not celebrate female initiation rites, nevertheless observe the functional equivalent of such a ceremony. Every girl must serve as an auxiliary at a male initiation rite. The girdle which she receives in token for her services is prerequisite for marriage. The Bontoc, another matrilocal group without rites, observe a change of residence at adolescence. The young girl goes to live in a special dormitory. The Cagaba and the Lesu observe rites in spite of the fact that they are neolocal. However, the married couple continues to live in the same village as the young girl's parents but in a different village from that of the bridegroom. Thus, although the young girl leaves the domestic unit of her parents at marriage, she continues to be closer to them than she is to the family of her husband. Among the patrilocal societies which are not predicted to celebrate rites, the Aranda, Dahomeans, Gusii, Mende, Mossi, Thonga, and the Tupinamba do observe such ceremonies. However, these rites are of a special type and are discussed below.

#### THE RELATIONSHIP OF PAINFUL RITES TO SEX IDENTITY CONFLICT

Female initiation rites, even when limited by a definition like that set forth, are by no means all similar in character. There are differences from society to society in the actual practices: sometimes the initiate is isolated, sometimes she is the center of attention; sometimes she feasts, sometimes she fasts. There are differences in the sanctions that apply to these practices: some threaten terrible consequences, some promise great benefits. And there are differences in the elaborateness of the ceremonies: some take years to complete and require extensive preparation; others are brief and performed without much to-do. Due to this complexity, many ways for categorizing these rites present themselves. The grouping to be used here is as follows: those that subject the initiate to great pain and those that do not. Although residence after marriage is the best single predictor of most female initiation rites, those few that inflict pain are related to other antecedents.

It is here hypothesized that when conditions in infancy and in childhood result in a "conflict of sex identity," initiation ceremonies for girls will be

extremely painful. Such rites are defined as those in which the initiate is subjected to a genital operation or is extensively tattooed. "Conflict of sex identity" is a concept formulated by Whiting, which must be defined within the framework of his theory of identification. (See Burton and Whiting 1961; Whiting 1961). According to this theory, status envy underlies identification. Status envy itself is based on the control of resources. "A resource is anything, material or non-material, which somebody wants and over which someone else may have control" (Burton and Whiting 1961:86). Such resources include food, freedom from pain, love and solace. Whiting sums up this theory of identification as follows:

If a child perceives that another has more efficient control over resources than he has, if, for example, he sees another person enjoying resources of high value to him when he is deprived of them, he will envy such a person and attempt to emulate him (Whiting 1960:118).

The infant girl spends the largest part of her time in bed. It is in this setting that she receives or does not receive the resources she desires. The person or persons who share this setting with her are those whom she will envy and with whom she will therefore identify. Whiting suggests that sleeping arrangements during infancy are the best measure of status envy during that period of life (see Burton and Whiting). Thus if the infant girl sleeps with both parents, Whiting suggests that her identification will be with the adult role. If, however, she sleeps with her mother only, she will identify with the female role. A very large number of societies have an exclusive mother-infant sleeping arrangement, and it is to these that we now turn our attention. When these infant sleeping arrangements are terminated, the small girl enters the world of the domestic unit, and it is here that the conditions of her subsequent status envy are encountered. Whiting writes:

In societies with patrilocal residence, a man will remain throughout his life in or near the house in which he was born, his wife or wives moving in from another village. In such societies, the domestic unit consists of a group of males closely related by blood and a group of in-marrying and interloping females. Prestige and power are clearly vested in this group of men and adult males are the ones to be envied. . . . This distribution of resources in the domestic unit provides the conditions for what we would like to call secondary identification (Burton and Whiting 1961:89).

Thus we see that when the young girl has experienced an exclusive mother-child sleeping arrangement, which fosters identification with her mother, and then moves into a male dominated domestic unit, which fosters identification with the male role, conditions for identification are confusing. It is to these circumstances that the concept of "conflict of sex identity" applies. And it is in societies characterized by such child rearing conditions that we would predict female initiation rites that inflict extreme pain.

The postulate can now be restated in a testable form. In societies practicing patrilocal residence, in which there is also an exclusive mother-infant sleeping arrangement, female initiation rites will subject the initiate to extreme pain in the form of a genital operation or extensive tattooing. Table 3 shows this relationship. The findings are in the expected direction, and more significant than the .02 level.

Two possible explanations of this relationship present themselves. First, when there is a conflict in sex identity, it may be necessary to "put women in their places"—to compel them to accept their role. This explanation assumes that there is greater conflict in accepting the female role in societies character-

TABLE 3. THE RELATIONSHIP OF CHILD REARING CONDITIONS THAT FOSTER A CONFLICT IN SEX IDENTITY TO THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF FEMALE INITIATION RITES

		No Female Rites	Non-Painful Female Rites	Painful Female Rites
Domestic Unit Male Dominated	Exclusive Mother-Infant Sleeping Arrangements	Alorese	Kiwai	Aranda
		Araucanians	Papago	Dahomeans
		Azande	Sanpoil	Gusii
		Balinese	Yagua	Mende
		Bhil		Mossi
		Kazak		Thonga
		Nuer		Tupinamba
	Non-Exclusive Mother-Infant Sleeping Arrangements	Rajput		
		Rwala		
		Somali <sup>a</sup>		
		Tallensi		
		Tanala		
		Aymara	Hottentot	
		Bulgarians	Nambicuara	
Copper Eskimo	Pukapukans			
Japanese	Tehuelche			
Lepcha				
Samoyed				
Tarongans				
Domestic Unit Non-Male Dominated		Ainu	Andamanese	Chama <sup>c</sup>
		Americans	Bemba	Choroti <sup>c</sup>
		Bontoc	Buka	Mundurucu <sup>b</sup>
		Cayapa	Burmese	
		Egyptians	Cagaba	
		French	Carib	
		Hausa	Cheyenne	
		Khasi	Chiricahua	
		Lapps	Cuna	
		Timbira	Ganda	
		Toda	Goajiro	
			Ifaluk	
			Iroquois	
			Jivaro	
		Lamba		
		Lesu		



ized by "conflict in identity" than there is in other societies. Most ethnographic accounts offer no evidence for or against this assumption. However, LeVine's account of initiation among the Gusii does offer some relevant information:

Although the atmosphere is one of almost frantic hilarity, the women indulge in insulting, fighting, and destructive behavior which would ordinarily be taboo. . . . Another notable aspect of the women's behavior is the playing of the male sex role: holding sticks which represent phalluses, singing songs of sex from the man's point of view, engaging in mock military combat, and even singing as one woman did: I want to be a man, not a woman. . . . (in Whiting, Beatrice B. (ed.) 1960:11).

Here we see that when ceremonial license permits the acting out of behavior that is otherwise taboo, the women of this society do give evidence of reluctance in accepting their role. However, similar incidences are not reported for other societies characterized by conflict in identity.

The other possible explanation lies in the relationship between male and female initiation rites. If one limits the definition of male initiation rites to only those ceremonies characterized by both a genital operation *and* seclusion, a very strong relationship emerges between these male rites and those female initiation ceremonies which subject the initiate to extreme pain. This relationship is represented on Table 4, and is significant at greater than the .001 level. Thus another possible explanation of these particular female initiation rites might be that they are a reflection of similar rites that are celebrated for males.

However, Whiting has found that those societies characterized by child rearing arrangements that foster a conflict in sex identity are the very societies that celebrate male initiation rites. (Burton and Whiting 1961; see also Whiting 1961) He writes:

In societies with maximum conflict in sex identity, e.g., where a boy initially sleeps exclusively with his mother and where the domestic unit is patrilocal and hence controlled by men, there will be initiation rites at puberty whose function is to resolve this conflict in identity. (Burton and Whiting 1961:90).

---

		Naskapi
		Navaho
		Ojibwa
		Paiute
		Thai
		Tlingit
		Tubatulabal
<hr/>		
Not Ascertained	Dilling Fulani	Teda Yurok

---

$\chi^2 = 5.65$  ( $p < .02$ )

<sup>a</sup> The Somali do practice genital operations and infibulation, but before the age of puberty is reached.

<sup>b</sup> The Mundurucu practice tattooing for both sexes.

<sup>c</sup> Residence ratings by Murdock used.

TABLE 4. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MALE INITIATION RITES AND THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF FEMALE INITIATION RITES

	No Female Rites	Non-Painful Female Rites	Painful Female Rites
Male Rites: <i>Both</i> Genital Operation and Seclusion	Azande Hausa Somali <sup>a</sup>	Lesu	Aranda Dahomeans Gusii Mende Mossi Thonga
Male Rites: <i>Either</i> Genital Operation or Seclusion	Balinese Bontoc <sup>b</sup> Egyptians <sup>b</sup> Kazak <sup>b</sup> Nuer Rwala <sup>b</sup> Tallensi Tanala <sup>b</sup> Timbira	Buka Hottentot Jivaro Pukapukans	
Male Rites Absent	Alorese Americans Araucanians Aymara Bhil Bulgarians Cayapa Copper Eskimo French Lapps Lepcha Rajput Tarongans Toda	Andamanese Bemba Burmese Cagaba Carib Chiricahua Cuna Ganda Goajiro Ifaluk Iroquois Lamba Nambicuara Navaho Ojibwa Paiute Papago Sanpoil Tehuelche Thai Tlingit Tubatulabal	Mundurucu <sup>c</sup> Tupinamba

Thus the same child rearing arrangements are related both to the presence of male and of painful female rites. The conflict in sex identity appears to necessitate certain adolescent observances for both sexes.

To conclude, the few female initiation rites characterized by painfulness are not related to residence after marriage as other female initiation rites are. Instead, they are related to those conditions of child rearing that foster a conflict in sex identity. Painful female initiation rites are also related to male initiation rites characterized by both a genital operation and seclusion. Since male rites are also strongly related to the presence of a conflict in sex identity, perhaps the latter condition makes it necessary for a society to force both sexes to accept their respective roles.

#### THE RELATIONSHIP OF RITES TO FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN SUBSISTENCE ACTIVITIES

The educational purpose of initiation rites is one that has often been stressed by ethnographers, who see in these ceremonies the equivalent of the schooling received by children in Western society. A very large number of rites do indeed contain periods of instruction and/or tests of competence for the initiate, and this fact certainly lends support to the idea that the purpose of these ceremonies is educational. Richards writes as follows:

As we have seen, Bemba women explain that they are teaching the candidates during the chisungu ceremony. They say with great emphasis and characteristic repetition "We teach and teach and teach the girls" and they sometimes add "We make them clever" using the causative form of the verb "to be intelligent and socially competent and to have a knowledge of etiquette" (*ukubacenjela*). (Richards 1956:125.).

Explaining female initiation rites by calling them an educational device is an oversimplification of the facts, however, and does not account for those preliterate societies that do not observe these ceremonies.

It is here hypothesized that only when women have real importance in the

---

		Yagua	
		Yurok	
<hr/>			
Male Rites			
Not Ascertained	Ainu	Cheyenne	Chama
	Dilling	Kiwai	Choroti
	Fulani	Naskapi	
	Japanese	Teda	
	Khasi		
	Samoyed		

---

$\chi^2 = 19.19$  ( $p < .001$ )

\* The Somali do practice genital operations for girls, as well as infibulation, but this occurs before puberty.

<sup>b</sup> These male genital operations take place before the eighth year.

<sup>c</sup> The Mundurucu practice tattooing for both sexes.

TABLE 5. THE RELATIVE CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN TO SUBSISTENCE ACTIVITIES

Societies above The Median	Score	Societies below the Median	Score
Buka	192	Cheyenne	108
Pukapukans	180	Dilling	108
Cayapa	174	French	108
Iroquois	174	Kiwai	108
Tupinamba	174	Somali	108
Alorese	168	Bemba	105
Dahomeans	156	Yagua	105
Goajiro	156	Tarongans	102
Thonga	152	Burmese	99
Jivaro	150	Khasi	99
Timbira	150	Mundurucu	99
Andamanese	144	Ainu	96
Aranda	144	Araucanians	96
Carib	144	Papago	96
Chiricahua	144	Thai	96
Hottentot	144	Japanese	90
Kazak	144	Lamba	90
Lesu	142	Lapps	90
Naskapi	138	Navaho	90
Ojibwa	138	Tanala	90
Chama	132	Yurok	90
Nambicuara	132	Mossi	78
Nuer	132	Copper Eskimo	72
Azande	129	Sanpoil	72
Choroti	126	Tallensi	72
Paiute	126	Tlingit	72
Ifaluk	120	Balinese	69
Tubatulabal	120	Cuna	69
Gusii	117	Hausa	69
Fulani	114	Teda	66
Ganda	114	Tehuelche	60
Lepcha	114	Rwala	54
Mende	114	Egyptians	48
Bhil	112	Americans	36
Aymara	108	Rajput	36
Bontoc	108	Samoyed	36
Bulgarians	108	Toda	36
Cagaba	108		

subsistence activities of their society will female initiation rites be celebrated. Under such circumstances it is necessary both to assure the girl and those around her of her competence to fulfill her future obligations and to impress upon her the importance of her role. In those societies in which women do not contribute substantially to subsistence activities, rites will not be celebrated, as this special preparation for adulthood is not necessary.

The measurement of women's relative importance in subsistence activities is based on ratings by Murdock (1957). These indicate the number and type of activities upon which a society depends, the relative importance of each, and the degree of participation of women in each. By assigning numerical values to the degree of importance of each activity and to the relative contribution of women, a score is derived which indicates the importance of women in the subsistence activities of their society. (For a detailed description of the derivation of these scores, see the Appendix.) The scores for the societies of the sample are given in Table 5.

On this table the 75 societies have been divided into two groups: those above the median and those below the median. The nine societies receiving the median score of 108 were assigned to their respective groups at random. When arranged alphabetically, the first four were placed in the above median category and the next five were placed in the below the median category. This was done in order to avoid the uneven division of the 75 cases that occurs when all nine societies receiving a score of 108 are placed with either of the two groups.

According to our postulate, we would predict that female initiation rites would occur in those societies in which the relative contribution of women is above the median, and that these ceremonies would be absent in those societies in which the relative contribution of women is below the median. Table 6 shows that the findings are in the expected direction and attain the .05 level of significance. We can therefore conclude that when women make a notable contribution to the subsistence activities of their society, female initiation rites are celebrated to assure the competence of the young girl.

#### SUMMARY

Three major conclusions may be drawn from the present research. First, female initiation rites occur in those societies in which the young girl does not leave the domestic unit of her parents after marriage. As she spends her adult life among the same people and in the same setting as her childhood, the rite represents a special measure taken to proclaim her changed status when she reaches adulthood.

Second, those few female initiation rites which subject the initiate to extreme pain are observed in those societies in which conditions in infancy and in childhood result in a conflict of sex identity. Painful female initiation ceremonies are also related to male initiation rites characterized by *both* a genital operation and seclusion. These male rites are again related to the presence of

TABLE 6. THE RELATIVE CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN TO SUBSISTENCE  
ACTIVITIES AND THE PRESENCE OR ABSENCE OF RITES

	Rites Absent	Rites Present
Women's Contribution to Subsistence Activities above Median	Alorese	Andamanese
	Aymara	Aranda
	Azande	Buka
	Bhil	Cagaba
	Bontoc	Carib
	Bulgarians	Chama
	Cayapa	Chiricahua
	Fulani	Choroti
	Kazak	Dahomeans
	Lepcha	Ganda
	Nuer	Goajiro
	Timbira	Gusii
		Hottentot
		Ifaluk
	Iroquois	
	Jivaro	
	Lesu	
	Mende	
	Nambicuara	
	Naskapi	
	Ojibwa	
	Paiute	
	Pukapukans	
	Thonga	
	Tubatulabal	
	Tupinamba	
Women's Contribution to Subsistence Activities below Median	Ainu	Bemba
	Americans	Burmese
	Araucanians	Cheyenne
	Balinese	Cuna
	Copper Eskimo	Kiwai
	Dilling	Lamba
	Egyptians	Mossi
	French	Mundurucu
	Hausa	Navaho
	Japanese	Papago
	Khasi	Sanpoil
	Lapps	Teda
	Rajput	Tehuelche
	Rwala	Thai
	Samoyed	Tlingit
	Somali	Yagua
Tallensi	Yurok	
Tanala		
Tarongans		
Toda		

sex identity conflict. Thus it appears that when this conflict arises, special measures must be taken to force both sexes to accept their respective roles.

Third, female initiation rites are found in those societies in which women make a notable contribution to subsistence activities. Because of her future importance to the life of the society, the young girl is given special assurance of her competence through the rite.

#### APPENDIX

##### Assessment of the Importance of Women in Subsistence Activities

The method here suggested is based on the ratings found in G. P. Murdock's "World Ethnographic Sample," (1957) and follows the basic scheme set down by Heath (1958). To determine the contribution of women in the subsistence activities of any society, the importance of each activity is given a numerical value; it is then multiplied by another numerical value, that assigned to the degree of female participation in the activity. The products for all of the activities are totalled to give each society a score. A high score indicates high female participation, and a low score indicates the opposite.

Heath's method had two major drawbacks. First, societies with numerous and diverse subsistence activities tended to receive a higher score regardless of the importance of women. Second, the category "a," coded by Murdock (1957) to represent "standard division of labor by sex," was not used. This was a serious omission, as "a" occurs frequently.

It seems justified to assign a value to "a" that is above "b" (equal participation by both sexes), and below "g" and "f" (predominantly female participation). Certainly women are more indispensable when their particular tasks cannot be done by men even though they are not depended upon for the entire activity. The numerical values here assigned to Murdock's participation categories are as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} f &= 6 \\ g &= 5 \\ a &= 4 \\ b &= 3 \\ n &= 2 \\ m &= 1 \end{aligned}$$

When category "s" or "." occurs in conjunction with "P," the activity is treated as if scored "Oo." When "." occurs in conjunction with "I," "I" is multiplied by 3.5, or the mean rating for female participation.

The other problem posed by Heath's method is not solved so easily. It requires that the total number of activities, as well as the relative importance of each, influence the numerical weights assigned. "D" (or "C" and "C") is weighted at least twice as heavily as "I," and "I" in turn carries twice as much weight as "P." This is the case whether a society relies on one or many subsistence activities. The total of the capital letter scores (before they are multiplied by the numerical values representing the small letters) is always

36. This will be so whether a society has many or few activities. Table 7 indicates the value for each capital letter category in every possible combination.

In order to ascertain the importance of women in the subsistence activities of any given society these steps are followed: First, the number of activities and their relative importance is found in "World Ethnographic Sample" as indicated there by capital letter codes in columns 2-5. The capital letter combination when found in Table 3 indicates the relative numerical weighting for each activity. Each of these is in turn multiplied by the numerical equivalent of the small letter with which it appears. (The small letter indicates the degree of female participation.) The products are added and the resulting score can vary from a maximum of 216 (high importance of women in subsistence activities) to a minimum of 36 (low importance of women in subsistence activities).

TABLE 7

	D	I	P	C
D I I I	24	4		
D I I P	26	4	2	
D I P P	28	4	2	
D I I O	24	6		
D I O O	24	12		
D P P P	30		2	
D P P O	30		3	
D P O O	30		6	
D O O O	36			
D I P O	27	6	3	
C C I I		4		14
C C I P		4	2	15
C C I O		6		15
C C P P			2	16
C C P O			3	16½
C C O O				18

Example: The Cuna are rated as follows: Dn Oo In Pm. When we have the combination D I P O, D=27, I=6 P=3. We now multiply 27 by 2, 6 by 2, and 3 by 1, and total the products. The result is a score of 69, which is a low score.

## REFERENCES CITED

- BENEDICT, RUTH  
1946 Patterns of culture. New York, The New American Library.
- BETTELHEIM, BRUNO  
1954 Symbolic wounds. Glencoe, Ill., The Free Press.
- BONAPARTE, MARIE  
1950 Notes on excision. In *Psychoanalysis and the Social Sciences*, Vol. 2, Géza Róheim, ed. New York, The International Universities Press, Inc.



BRYK, FELIX

1931 *Die Beschneidung bei Mann und Weib*. Neubrandenburg, Verlag Gustav Feller.

BURTON, ROGER V. and JOHN W. M. WHITING

1961 The absent father and cross-sex identity. *Merill-Palmer Quarterly of Behavior and Development* 7(2):85-95.

CRAWLEY, ERNEST and THEODORE BESTERMAN

1927 *The mystic rose*. Vols. 1 and 2. New York: Boni and Liveright, Publishers.

D'ANDRADE, R. G. and JOHN W. M. WHITING

n.d. A cross-cultural study of residence from infancy through marriage. Mimeographed. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University, Laboratory of Human Development.

DU BOIS, CORA ALICE

1932 *Girls' adolescence observances in North America*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of California, Berkeley.

FORD, CLELLAN S. and FRANK A. BEACH

1951 *Patterns of sexual behavior*. New York, Harper Brothers.

FRAZER, SIR JAMES G.

1913 *The golden bough*. Vols. 1, 3, 10, and 12. London, Macmillan and Co., Ltd.

FREUD, SIGMUND

1918 Contributions to the psychology of love. The taboo of virginity. *Collected papers* 4:217-35. London, Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis.

HEATH, DWIGHT B.

1958 Sexual division of labor and cross-cultural research. *Social Forces* 37(1):77-79.

LABORATORY OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

n.d. Code for maximum dispersion of economy, descent and political integration. Mimeographed. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University.

MURDOCK, G. P.

1957 World ethnographic sample. *American Anthropologist* 59:664-87.

READ, MARGARET

1960 *Children of their fathers*. New Haven, Yale University Press.

RICHARDS, AUDREY I.

1956 *Chisungu: a girl's initiation ceremony among the Bemba of Northern Rhodesia*. New York, Grove Press.

STEPHENS, WILLIAM N.

1959 Child rearing and oedipal fears: a cross-cultural study. Published doctoral dissertation. Graduate School of Education, Harvard University.

VAN GENNEP, ARNOLD

1909 *Les rites de passage*. Paris, Librairie Critique Emil Nourry.

VAN WATERS, MIRIAM

1913, The adolescent girl among primitive peoples. *Journal of Religious Psychology*

1914 6(4):375-421; 7(1):32-40, 75-120.

WHITING, BEATRICE B., ed.

1960 *Socialization in six societies*. Mimeographed. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University, Laboratory of Human Development.

WHITING, JOHN W. M.

1960 Resource mediation and learning by identification. *In Personality Development in Children*, Ira Iscoe and Harold W. Stevenson, eds. Austin, Texas, University of Texas Press.

1961 Socialization process and personality. *In Psychological Anthropology: Approaches to Culture and Personality*, Francis L. K. Hsu, ed. Homewood, Ill., The Dorsey Press.

WINTERSTEIN, ALFRED

1928 *Die Pubertätsriten der Mädchen mit deren Spuren in Märchen*. *Imago* 14:199-274.