

ANTHROPOLOGY

From our reporter at the meeting of the American Anthropological Association in San Francisco

Anthropology faces the future

Anthropology is not about to fade away, but many of its subjects are. Technological influences continue to reduce the number of pristine cultures available for study. Many of the remaining societies are beginning to resent the intrusions of Western researchers. Anthropologists are responding to this situation in several ways. David Maybury-Lewis of Harvard University and several others have formed a group called Cultural Survival, Inc., whose aim is to help endangered societies preserve themselves and to encourage national governments from destroying such societies.

Other anthropologists are turning more and more to the study of their own culture (much in the manner of sociologists and psychologists). This year's meeting included a study of poker players in Missoula, Mont., an anthropological analysis of United States courtroom behavior, coping strategies (including belief in voodoo) in urban ghettos, cultural aspects of aging and obesity as well as studies of work, play and religion in the United States. But not all anthropologists are ready to give up so easily. Some are preparing for contact with really alien cultures. One symposium, composed mainly of science fiction stories, was devoted to discussion of the possible role anthropologists will play in interacting with extraterrestrial cultures.

Magic, mutilation and punishment

If warfare is the natural result of an innate aggressive drive in humans, then it is possible that other forms of aggression, such as combative sports, can replace warfare or at least reduce the build up of pressure that leads to war. This theory has been called the drive-discharge model of aggression. Richard G. Sipes did a cross-cultural study of warlike and nonwarlike societies and the amount and type of sports activity found in each (SN: 10/20/73, p. 250). His work discredited the drive-discharge model by showing that nine out of ten of the warlike societies did have combative type sports. Only two out of ten of the nonwarlike societies had such sports. In place of the drive-discharge model, Sipes proposed a cultural-pattern model that does not view aggression as a drive or pressure to be discharged, but rather as part of an overall pattern of cultural values that are learned and mutually reinforcing.

Sipes has now added several other variables to his research. He and Bruce A. Robertson of Long Island University's Southampton College have studied the same societies with respect to three behaviors: the practice of malevolent magic against fellow community members, body mutilation (tattooing, scarifying, piercing, amputation and shape distortion), and harsh punishment of deviates. These behaviors, like combative sports, could be discharge paths for an aggressive drive or they could be part of an overall cultural pattern. The researchers found significant correlations, all in the direction predicted by the culture-pattern model.

Hypnotism: Culturally unacceptable

Medical anthropologists, whose growing field includes the study of health-related beliefs and behaviors, often act as intermediators or "brokers" between medical professionals and communities seeking medical services. The picture that most often comes to mind in this connection is probably that of a Western medico trying to convince someone from another culture that a syringe is more potent than a shaman. This type of convincing can also go in the other direction. A case in

point, says Jane Teas of John Hopkins University, has to do with the reluctance of Western medical professionals and patients to accept the use of hypnotism as a form of anesthesia.

Teas was instructed in self hypnosis by an anesthesiologist. She then applied the technique instead of drugs during a breast biopsy that lasted more than an hour. "I was conscious of all that occurred," she reports, "but never felt pain and had a very rapid recovery." She points out that hypnosis produces a beneficial physician-patient relationship and has no adverse side effects while normal drug anesthesia causes approximately 6,000 deaths a year in the United States.

Convinced of the benefits of hypnosis during surgery, Teas uses it as an example of how medical anthropology can be helpful in the understanding of medical care. To do so she has analyzed some of the cultural factors that limit its general use.

Historical avoidance is one point. Although hypnosis has been used in surgery for more than 150 years, it probably has a tarnished image because of its association with entertainment and occultism. On another level, hypnotism does not fit the cultural expectations of Western society. Patients have learned to expect physical or drug intervention rather than overt psychic intervention. Also, hypnotism is not a cash industry and would compete with the profitable drug trade. Therefore, it is not advertised and patient demand for it is low. A better understanding of such cultural factors may be important in defining future medical strategies.

Anthropological sexology

Masters and Johnson released some of their first data and showed some of their first clinical films at an anthropology meeting in 1961. Women anthropologists attempted to avoid the topic of sex and were reluctant to explore the data in detail; men faced the subject with jokes. Since then, and since the so-called sexual revolution, a change in attitude might have been expected among anthropologists, but such does not seem to be the case, according to Marian K. Slater of the City University of New York in Queens. She traced the attitudes of anthropologists through published works and through reactions expressed at various meetings. Among her findings: Although some literature has been presented, anthropology has continued to avoid dealing with sexual behavior. Some field researchers have avoided questions about sexual behavior for fear of being asked the same questions in return. Sex still comes second to weaving techniques. Most anthropologists are conservative and would rather lose valuable information than be labeled, "pornographers."

The shrinking tooth

It has long been suspected that as human populations grew in technological elaboration they shrank in tooth dimension. The longer the period of time a population has enjoyed the benefits of technology, especially with regard to food preparation (pottery, heated stone cookery), the smaller are its teeth. Fossils from Europe suggest that dental reduction may have begun there and spread eastward to other parts of the world. This may be related to the development of cooking techniques that accompanied the beginning of intensive agriculture there about 10,000 years ago. C. Loring Brace of Michigan University has applied the theory to populations in Australasia and found that it holds true, with the largest teeth being those of Australian aborigines. Differential reduction of chewing surface gradually led to the varying facial forms of living populations.