

## Powhatan Gender Roles

### Part One

hamlet – village

Tuckahoe – roots

The Powhatan wake up in the early dawn. They bathe, have breakfast, and turn to their work for the day. Some of the hamlet's women and girls start pounding dried Tuckahoe into flour for bread, talking as they work and possibly singing work songs to keep up the pounding rhythm. Other women fetch spring water to start the day's stew. Men and boys will go out to get meat at intervals all day long: boys gather mussels, men and boys alike try their luck at hunting, and anyone can dip into the fish trap if the tide is right.

dexterous – good at steering

Both genders will join work parties that leave the village to accomplish their tasks. These work parties will travel by canoe. The women are dexterous and almost as strong as the men when handling the canoes.

The first work party of women goes out to the fields. They are planting one field and weeding another that was planted a month ago. Some women carry babies to the fields in their cradleboards, which can be hung from a tree nearby. Each family has several fields to care for; when all of the fields are under cultivation, some men may help their busy wives. When the women finish weeding, they leave a boy or two behind to act as a scarecrow. Powhatan boys are already under pressure to become marksmen and contribute to the stewpot, so they will not only scare off birds, but sit quietly and allow corn-eating animals like raccoons, opossums, and even deer enter the field and get close enough to shoot. The corn that the fields produce will eventually be harvested and cooked by the women.

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## Part Two

dexterous – good at steering

Both genders will join work parties that leave the village to accomplish their tasks. These work parties will travel by canoe. The women are dexterous and almost as strong as the men when handling the canoes.

One work party has women gathering berries and greens. There is also a work party of women collecting firewood. This job must be done daily to keep the house fires going all day every day. There is also a party of women who use the canoes to visit fish traps to remove the fish.

marsh – soft, wet land with grassy vegetation

Another party of women leaves the village paddling in canoes to get tubers, or roots, called Tuckahoe. These plants grow 12 to 18 inches down in the mud of a marsh. Three women surround a clump of plants and use long sticks to pry the plants out of the mud. This can take up to twenty minutes for each clump. These clumps float and a second team of women washes the mud from the plants, cuts off the leaves, separates the tubers, and lifts them into the canoe. Once home, these tubers are sun-dried, baked, and ground into flour.

Some of the women stay behind in the village to care for the toddlers who are unable to trek into the woods and fields.

carcasses – bodies

butcher – cut up for meat

The day's stew is underway in each household. Stew, one of the mainstays of Powhatan life, varies throughout the day. As men and boys bring in animal carcasses, women butcher these. As men and women bring in fish, women gut them. As boys bring in shellfish, women open them. All of these ingredients are added to the stew throughout the day.

# Powhatan Gender Roles

## Part Three

Both genders will join work parties that leave the village to accomplish their tasks. These work parties will travel by canoe. The women are dexterous and almost as strong as the men when handling the canoes.

dexterous – good at steering

Women rebuild the houses every three to five years. Saplings are cut and seasoned in a bent position. Two lines of holes are dug and the bent saplings are placed in them. More saplings are used to build the walls, starting at the lowest point and moving upward. This way the women can stand on them as they move up. The weight of the women working from each side bends the walls over so that they meet and can be tied together to make a roof. A gap is left in the roof for a smoke hole. Young children help by handing the women the materials they need as they work.

saplings – very young trees

gap – hole

Women remaining in the village also do other sorts of work. Baskets are made from a variety of materials. There is always need for more cordage. Cordage is made by twining together small pieces of bark and wood. Some of the cordage will be sewn into mats for shingles, bed covers, and rugs. The reeds for such mats have to be chopped down in the marsh. Reeds, when collected into bundles, are surprisingly heavy. Women are responsible for collecting them and hauling them back to the village by canoe.

cordage – rope

twining – twisting

shingles – roof coverings

marsh – soft, wet land with grassy vegetation

hauling – carrying

hamlet - village

kneaded – massaged

One of the women in the hamlet is potting today. She has already dug and cleaned the clay. The woman has kneaded the clay to soften it. She is building her pot. It is slow, careful work, and a large stewpot may take more than two days to build.

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## Part Four

carcasses – bodies

hides – skins

Men hunt deer, and bring the carcasses back to the village. Women use many parts of the deer. First, they tan, or finish, the hides of the deer. The tanning process takes several days and involves stretching a hide, drying it overnight, scraping it for several hours to remove tissue and hair, soaking it overnight, and drying it out again before smoking it. Once the hide has been tanned, it is similar to leather and can be used for clothing, shoes, or other necessities. Women also use the tendons from the carcass of the deer. Tendons are very strong type of material that attaches muscles and bones. The women dry the tendons and separate into thread for sewing. The bone of the deer is also used. Women create needles out of deer bone.

chiseling – shaping

Women also chisel out wooden utensils and platters. Chiseling things into shape using stone tools is something that men and women alike have been doing since childhood.

hamlet – village

There are still other women's jobs. There are elderly or perhaps sick or injured younger people to nurse. Women serve as barbers, using sharp-edged mussel shells to keep the right side of male heads shaved. The women are the people responsible for the decorative arts practice in the hamlet. They create elaborate tattoos for much of the exposed flesh on their bodies.

mantle - headpiece

Women also make puccoon, reducing the root to a powder and mixing it with grease to make paint for the heads and shoulders of both genders. Feather mantles are another spectacular product of women's work. Men hunt for ducks and geese in spring and fall and for turkeys all year long. Women cook the carcasses of the birds and keep the feathers for weaving into a mantle.