Anthropology 2240
Questions for The Sambia

Introduction

1. What does Herdt mean by marriage? Is Herdt really talking about marriage?
2. Why did Herdt reverse his opinion that the sexual activities he witnessed were homosexual acts?
3. What is the relationship between violence and male initiation rites among the Sambia?
4. How did Herdt end up studying the Sambia?
5. Pay attention to Herdt’s definitions on page xxiii. How are the concepts of sexual culture, sexual identity, sexual orientation, and sexual attraction related?

Chapter 1: The Mountain Setting

1. Where do the Sambia live? How are their physical and village environments organized? What kind of economic system do they employ?
2. What are the gender roles associated with horticulture? How does Herdt explain these differences?
3. How is Sambia religion gendered?

Chapter 2: Warfare and Cultural Life

1. Evaluate this sentence in Herdt’s opening paragraph: “Their cultural creation was an exceptional sexual culture adapted to a world of constant war.” Is Herdt right to equate sexual activity and warfare for the Sambia?
2. What is masculine prestige?
3. What biases does Herdt, a male anthropologist, bring to his assessment of Sambia sexual culture?
4. What is jerungdu and how does it work?
5. What kinds of marriage are recognized by the Sambia? How are they related?
6. What types of men Sambia are characterized by Herdt?

Chapter 3: Sambia Social Individuals

1. What does Herdt mean by ‘social individual’?
2. Is the presentation of Sambia people as ‘cameo portraits’ effective? Why and why not?
3. What types of people does Herdt present to you? Are they exceptional in some way, or, can you consider them portraits of general members of Sambia society?
Chapter 4: The Men’s Secret Society

1. Does this chapter support or invalidate the article on male initiation and masculinity by Gilmore?
2. What is semen to the Sambia?
3. What is Moondi’s decision? Why is it difficult for him?
4. The description of the initiation is long and detailed. Pay attention to the goals of the initiation. How does it reinforce Sambia notions of masculinity?
5. How do the Sambia explain the violence of the initiation?
6. What is Herdt’s position in the initiation? What do you make of that? Does his work raise ethical issues for you?
7. What happens to the boys in the liminal stage of the initiations?

Chapter 5: The Magical Age of 10

1. Why do the initiations occur by age 10?
2. How does Herdt’s explanation balance nature and nurture?
3. What is the distinction between ‘sexual lifeways’ and ‘sexual orientation’? Why does Herdt make the distinction?

Chapter 6: Sex/Gender, Power and Social Inequality

1. What lessons do the Sambia provide us in North America?
2. What is the sexual paradox in Sambia society?
3. How is social inequality created through contractual marriage?
4. How do the Sambia conceptualize sexual intercourse?
5. What sexual agency do women have?

Chapter 7: Sexuality and Revolutionary Change

1. What changes have come to Sambia culture since Herdt’s initial work? What has been the effect on Sambia sexual culture?
2. What is the new masculinity?
3. What is meant by ‘luv marriage’? What would Jankowiak or Burbank have to say?