

Cultures

Sociology



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Experience with Yanomami Culture Experience with Yanomami Culture My friend comes from the Yanomami community in Venezuela, and he asked me to accompany him home in the last summer holiday. I was immensely intrigued with the idea of spending a holiday away from home with a friend, though I feared the circumstances that might come up. On the other hand, I had the excitement to experience the practices of a culture, which is different from my own. Therefore, I saw the visit as an opportunity to learn a new thing.

There are several things that shocked me about the Yanomami culture. The first surprising thing is that the Yanomami girls should marry immediately after their first menstrual cycle. Further, the girls experiencing the menstrual flow do not mingle with other people; as the blood is believed to be poisonous. Further, these girls should not touch food with their hands; rather, their mothers feed them using a stick (Webster, 2004). I got shocked because the girls experiencing the menstrual flow get confined in a building, and they do not get any sanitary towels that they can use to maintain hygiene. The onset of the menstrual cycle signifies that the girls have gone through the transition from children to becoming adult women, which is at the age of ten or even twelve.

I had to acclimate myself to the fact that the Yanomami people practice endocannibalism; this is the only ritual that women should take part.

Endocannibalism describes the process of ingesting the bones of a dead person to ensure that the spirit of the dead person remains (Webster, 2004). In this ritual, the body of a dead person undergoes cremation and the bones not consumed by the fire are ground and mixed with food. This food is shared among the members of the community to ensure that the spirit of the

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dead person rejuvenates in every living person within the community. Furthermore, I experienced culture shock when I learnt that young boys and adult men have the freedom to practice anal sex without any restrictions. On the other hand, the women in the Yanomami community were prohibited from engaging in any sexual activity except with their spouses. The extent of male dominance and male privileges in this community were shocking; the women were treated as minors regardless of their age (Webster, 2004). However, there were several things that were not surprising or shocking about the Yanomami community. For instance, I was not surprised by the fact that the Yanomami people depend on shifting cultivation for their food. Further, the community had uncomplicated political structures and social arrangements. The community was not sophisticated, and they did their things in comprehensible ways. They held celebratory parties with neighboring communities to commemorate bumper harvest (Webster, 2004). These celebrations served to eliminate conflicts between neighbors, as well as spread the political influence of leaders the villages that had a sizeable harvest. Further, I was not surprised by the fact that political leadership and family leadership were dominated by men. This is a common phenomenon among many societies all over the world. Female leadership did not go beyond a woman's control over her own children, or the first wife of a polygamous man over the rest of the wives.

References

Webster, C. (2004). Yanomami. New York: Weigl Publishers Inc.