

Sambia Nosebleeding Rites and Male Proximity to Women

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Since the early work of Bateson (1936) and Mead (1935), New Guinea cultures—especially in the Eastern Highlands studied by Read (1951, 1952)—have been identified with various initiatory rituals, among which none have proved as symbolically complex or theoretically controversial as those of bloodletting. In spite of considerable cross-cultural variation in the practices, researchers have not only drawn on these data, but have also reached divergent conclusions about their meaning. Furthermore, each of the proposed interpretations implied different slants on the developmental context of the rites that were seldom explicated, let alone demonstrated. It is remarkable, then, that after these many years of

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theoretical interest no ethnographer since Read (1965:127-133) had published detailed observations of these ritual behaviors until recently (cf. Lewis 1980; Poole 1982; Tuzin 1980:72-78), and none has systematically described the behavioral experience or cultural context of bloodletting in the male life cycle of a Highlands people. It is these problems—in relation to the cultural structure of nosebleeding and the ritualization of proximity to women throughout the developmental cycle—that I shall examine among the Sambia, a hunting and horticultural people of the Eastern Highlands.

New Guineasts have tended to view bloodletting rites from several analytic perspectives. Read's (1952) emphasis on the social solidarity effected by the cult context of such rites has been widely supported (Berndt 1962; Newman 1965; Strathern 1969). Others have also concurred with Read (1952:13) that bloodletting is a form of "psychological conditioning" associated with the male warrior ethos (Allen 1967; Hogbin 1970; Mead 1935; Tuzin 1980; Whiting 1941). Meggitt (1964) saw consistent correlations between types of sexual activity (e.g., "lechers" and "prudes"), purificatory cults, and intergroup hostility vis-à-vis affines (cf. Allen 1967:11-12, 52-53). Langness (1967) went further, arguing that "sexual antagonism"—within the warring Highlands environment—arose as a culturally constituted response to deny men's dependence upon women. Lindenbaum (1972, 1976) contended that rites like male bloodletting operate as systemic ecological controls on women and their productivity (cf. Chowning 1980). Langness (1974) further added that the secrecy of cult rituals effects *male* solidarity and power in regulating strategic female domains in which male social control needs "supernatural" aids. Moreover, many New Guineasts have emphasized native ideas that expurgations of maternal substance or "pollution" are needed to develop and maintain masculinity (Bateson 1936:130ff.; Berndt 1965:92-94; Herdt 1981; Hogbin 1970:103ff.; Lewis 1980; Mead 1935:85; Meigs 1978; Newman 1964; Poole 1982; Read 1951, 1965; Whiting 1941:64ff.). In sum, however, these studies have taken a synchronic viewpoint which stresses the *adult outcome* of ritual experiences for the functioning of social groups and institutions.

Here I take a diachronic perspective on Sambia sexual polarity and ritual that will, I hope, offer fresh questions and answers about ritual bloodletting by attending to the developmental context in

which it emerges. Let me begin by stating several analytic points about the Sambia sociocultural system (see Herdt 1981, 1982). The first point concerns a societal imperative: before pacification (1964-1965), Sambia communities needed to create tough, aggressive fighters to fill and replenish the ranks of their warriorhood. Next, I believe that the production of this type of "warrior personality" among males anywhere was not easy or "natural" (Mead 1935 and Schwartz 1973); moreover, its difficulties were exacerbated by the Sambia developmental cycle that results in the presence of too much mother and too little father, thus stunting the male's early separation from his mother in childhood. Last, the accommodation of these early childhood experiences, and core gender identity (see Stoller 1968), to the demanding behavioral environment of adult male character structure, established special, enduring, psychosocial needs for autonomy that could be symbolically sustained through ritual mechanisms—e.g., nosebleeding behaviors—enabling competent adjustment to, and performance of, the adult masculine gender role throughout life. Although these psychosocial needs arose as unintended social consequences of Sambia socialization, their symbolic expression has been culturally transmitted and reproduced to filter those needs. The symbolic structure specifically "filtered out" mother and all that she stood for, and "filtered in" father, aggressivity, and ritualized proximity to women; and these "symbolic filters" (Herdt 1981) came to take on a life of their own—as "internal discourses" for the institution and audiences (Foucault 1980:28) of bloodletting. Viewed in this way, the experience of nosebleeding binds the ideological and sensory poles of meaning to the *designata* of dominant symbols (Turner 1967) in Sambia ritual, making the male warrior ethos and world view (Geertz 1973) a dynamic product of a developmental context.

It is obvious and has been well reported (see below) that cutting the body in bloodletting is painful. It is also known that these "mutilation rites" are, throughout New Guinea, first administered forcibly by elders on groups of boys in collective initiation. Bloodletting is often said to be necessary for "male growth," so one can understand, in terms of the native model, why bloodletting should be done until maturity has been achieved. But what motivates those ritual behaviors afterwards, on into old age? Unless one assumes (as I do not) that these painful operations are *intrinsically* pleasurable

or satisfying, we must examine the cultural and social psychological factors that compel subsequent adult operations: beliefs, self experiences, and ever present audiences that are sufficiently approving or fearsome to result in the painful repetition of such self-inflicted acts. Here, I think, we anthropologists have still not met the challenge of Bettelheim's (1955:14) old question: What is "the function of mutilations regularly inflicted"? The Sambia material is helpful.

The Sambia ritual cycle of initiations emphasizes four broad developmental themes in males' relationships to women that define the context of nosebleeding throughout the life cycle. They emerge as follows: (1) Boys must be physically separated from their mothers, and then nosebled, to rid them of female pollutants that block "male growth" (a concept that is, however, complex). (2) The behavioral and cultural content of secret rites, especially nosebleeding, is organized violently so as to effect psychological detachment of boys vis-à-vis their mothers and avoidance of all females. (3) This ritual aggressiveness, furthermore, effects attachment to masculine figures through obedience to them as authorities, who train the boys to become warriors—social outcomes that help explain, but also require changes in—the cultural context of nosebleeding ritual following the initiates' social elevation into the upper ranks of the ritual cult hierarchy. (4) After marriage, nosebleeding acts are transformed from being involuntary public rituals to voluntary private events: men must (while alone) induce nosebleeding on each occasion of their wives' menstrual periods, into old age. And they also become initiators. Thus, initiation nosebleedings are a social control mechanism of the male cult which effects the *collective regulation* of boys; whereas among adult men, private nosebleedings become a means of one's autonomous *self-regulation* in contacts with women. The meaning of nosebleeding thus changes with successive ritual initiations; and, among adult men, those layers of meaning (concepts of manhood) are fixed within the developmental transformations in male character structure that enable one's self-regulation to come about. From these points there follows my thesis: psychosocial (and physical) *proximity to women* is the key variable in predicting the occurrence of nosebleeding behavior; changes in the cultural definitions of proximity, at different points in the male life cycle precisely regulates the shifting temporal sequence, ideological

teachings, sociocultural context, and the affective intensity of the bloodletting experience.

Each one of these developmental themes bearing on nosebleeding and proximity to women shall be examined in turn. A related and somewhat disconcerting pattern in the Sambia system will also be tackled. Sambia believe that a boy must be nosebled to "grow" and attain reproductive competence. But once married and fully initiated, men no longer offer that rationale for the private practices—not until middle age, that is. Among those older men, who have long since married once, twice, or more, and reared families, many again begin offering the pat statement that unless they nosebleed themselves they will "stop growing." The thick connotations of that sense of "growth" must be interpreted, since they involve the end point of psychosocial autonomy and contacts with women.

THE CULTURAL CONTEXT

Sambia are a mountain people inhabiting isolated river valleys of the remote Eastern Highlands. They number some 2,000 people dispersed in clusters of small hamlets over a wide region. Men hunt and both sexes garden. Descent is patrilineally based; residence is patrilocal. Marriage is arranged through infant betrothal or sister exchange. Warfare was endemic and destructive among Sambia. It had two forms: the stylized bow-fight among neighboring hamlets and the inter-hamlet war party sent to raid and kill neighboring tribes. Propinquitous hamlets thus inter-married and sometimes warred (cf. Meggitt 1964:219ff.). And every three or four years they joined together in building a great collective cult house to stage bachelorhood initiation (see Herdt 1981).

Relationships between the sexes are sharply polarized along the lines of a misogynist male belief system depicting women as polluting, depleting inferiors a man should distrust and keep distant. Most unrelated, sexually mature women are regarded as potentially contaminating relative to their menstrual and vaginal fluids. But these ideological stereotypes (see M. Strathern 1972) do shift somewhat, according to particular individuals and situations. For example, men fear contamination mostly from their wives, not their sisters. Like Tuzin (1982), I have noted a disparity between male ritual rhetoric and the more steady domestic relationships

among the sexes, including spouses. Sambia customarily expect the spouses to cohabit within a single domicile, and this pattern also affects men's ritually constituted misogyny. Nevertheless, one should not wish to push the significance of these constraints too far: men are in full charge of public affairs; women are relegated to heavy, dirty garden work and the polluting business of childbearing; ritual secrecy remains an enduring political and psychological force that suppresses women and children; most men are constantly mindful of female contamination and semen depletion through sexual intercourse; and abusive language, squabbling, and wife-beating, as well as suicides resulting from some such incidents, are pervasive in Sambia life.

The developmental cycle of children thus occurs in the context of open hostility, or at the least, ambivalence, in men's behavior toward their wives. Children are involved in this familial conflict. By custom, infants are exclusively cared for by their mothers; other female caretakers later help out. Fathers remain aloof since both mother and child are regarded as one in their polluting potential, especially following birth; and also because postpartum taboos strictly forbid close interaction among the spouses, since that would lead to sexual intercourse, harming both mother and infant. Boys and girls remain closely attached to their mothers until two or three years of age (and sometimes longer, according to particular circumstances, e.g., widowhood). Girls become their mother's companions, and they continue residing with their parents until marriage, usually around the time of the menarche (about 15–17 years of age). Thereafter, the young women reside with their husbands or parents-in-law, which often removes them to another hamlet. Boys spend more time with their mothers and playmates than they do with their fathers. This style of maternal attachment continues relatively unchanged until first-stage initiation. But boy-initiates are thereafter sanctioned for *any* contact (e.g., talking, looking at, or eating) with women, including their mothers. They reside exclusively in the men's clubhouses with other unmarried initiates and bachelors. Not until ten years and more later, after marriage and the strict deritualization of these avoidance taboos, may youths begin interacting with women again.

Men worry over the effects of the mother's prolonged contact with children, but especially with their sons. This concern is more than ideological rationalization, as one sees in actual case studies (see

Herdt 1981). Stated briefly, men regard the attainment of adult reproductive competence as far more problematic for males than females. Maleness is thought to depend on the acquisition of semen—the stuff of “biological” maleness—for precipitating male anatomic traits *and* masculine behavioral capacities (e.g., prowess). Femaleness rests on the creation and circulation of blood, which is held, in turn, to stimulate the production of menstrual blood, the menarche, and final reproductive competence. A girl's menarche is celebrated in secret events that simply recognize socially her “natural” achievements. In girls, who possess a self-activating and functional menstrual-blood organ (*tingu*), maturation is thus viewed as an unbroken process leading from birth and maternal bonding into adulthood. In boys, however, two obstacles block male growth: their mother's pollution, food, and overall caretaking, which at first nurtures but then stifles growth; and their innate lack of semen, since the semen organ (*kereku-kereku*) can only store, not manufacture, sperm—the key precipitant of manly reproductive competence. In the native model, then, femaleness is a natural development leading into feminine adulthood; maleness is not a naturally driven process but rather a personal achievement of which men wrest control through ritual initiations to ensure that boys attain adult masculine competence.

The Sambia ritual cult channels male development through six successive stages of initiation. The first three initiations are collectively performed by the regional confederacy of hamlets noted above. The cycle begins by constructing the cult house, quickly followed by third-stage initiation, a puberty rite (youths, ages 14–16). These graduated bachelors then assist in the staging of second-stage initiation (boys 11–13 years). Last, both these elevated age-grades join adult men in staging first-stage initiation (boys 7–10 years), creating a new regional set of age-mates. Following third-stage initiation, youths are eligible for marriage; within a year or more, fourth-stage initiation—a marriage ceremony and associated secret rites—can be held inside the hamlet. Later, at the menarche of a particular youth's wife, his fifth-stage initiation will be performed. (Until now and for some months afterwards, the youth continues residing in the clubhouse. Later, the couple will build a separate house, cohabit, and may then engage in coitus.) Finally a year or two later, at the birth of his first child, he is initiated and attains sixth-stage ritual status. After two children are born, he is ac-

corded the cultural status of full manhood (*aatmwunu*). What distinguishes Sambia ritualized masculine development from that of other Highlands initiatory cults is the prolonged institutionalization of secret homosexual fellatio, which is believed vital to the boy's maturation. Men hold that oral insemination is the only means of creating the "biological" changes needed to masculinize boys. It continues for many years, boys being first fellators then fellateds, and later, bisexuals. But, following marriage, custom decrees that homosexual activity halt and that men become exclusively heterosexual (see Herdt 1980, 1981).

THE BELIEF SYSTEM

How shall we take cognizance of the male belief system surrounding blood and female pollution in understanding the significance of secret nosebleeding? Here I wish to simply summarize a larger body of data to orient the following material on ritual behavior.

At various levels of meaning, blood and its secular and ritual *designata* are identified with the vitality and longevity of women and femaleness. Females, unlike males, are believed to be gifted with an endogenous means of producing blood that hastens the development of female growth, the menarche, and the menses; it is also the provider of womb life for the fetus. The male and female parts in reproduction are clearly defined: a man's semen enters the womb and becomes a pool that eventually coagulates into fetal skin and bone tissue, set within the female blood of the womb. Fetal blood, supplied only by the mother's womb, becomes the circulatory blood needed by all babies and adults.

For all humans, circulatory blood is thought to be an elixir—with limits—that stimulates body functioning and growth, and the ability to withstand sickness or injury. The limits of this idea are embedded in several constructs through which Sambia perceive blood. First, there is a tacit distinction that amounts to the difference between circulatory blood and menstrual-womb blood. Both males and females possess circulatory blood (*menjaaku*); but only females have menstrual blood (*chenchi*), categorized with all female contamination (*pulungatnyi*). Second, Sambia speak of reproductively competent humans (and also trees and animals) as being fluid or "watery" (*wunyu-tei*), not "dry" (*yaalkoogu*), that is,

either sexually mature or old and "used up." In females, fluidity stems from having circulatory and menstrual blood, vaginal fluids, and that part of her husband's semen a woman "ingests" through sexual intercourse. Males, by contrast, are fluid only through their original circulatory blood, and later (artificially ingested), semen. Children and old people are "dry" but girls are more fluid than boys; adults—unless sickly or sexually depleted—are fluid. Third, blood is said to be "cold," whereas semen is "hot." Since Sambia see sickness and plagues (*numbulyu-oolu*: "pathway of sickness") as incorporeal active agents attracted to "heat" and repelled by "cold," this temperature difference counts heavily in body functioning: the more blood, the less sickness; the more semen, the greater chance of illness and debilitation. Fourth, menstrual periods are likened to a periodic sickness that rids female bodies of excess *tingu* blood and any sickness that manages to penetrate them. Ironically, then, women bounce back from their periods with greater vitality *vis-à-vis* this "natural" expurgative function males lack (cf. Mead 1935:106). The female capacities to create and discharge blood are thus *designata* of the structure and functioning of women's bodies, the embodiments of birth-giving, procreative fluidity, and health, so men reckon that these mechanisms account for why women typically outlive men.

Now what matters for ritual nosebleeding is that menstrual-womb blood, although a life-giving female elixir, also represents the *sine qua non* of lethal fluids for male body functioning. By implication, all male circulatory blood originates from the mother's womb, so the collective initiatory nose-bleedings try to purge it. Other female substances like skin flakes, saliva, sweat, and especially vaginal fluids, are also classified as *pulungatnyi* and are felt to be inimical to men. (Male illness resulting from female sorcery usually hinges on the conviction that a man has incorporated menstrual or vaginal fluids.) But menstrual blood is dreaded most. Children take in these substances through birth, and later, through feeding and touching. Women definitely evince concern not to contaminate themselves or others, especially their children, with menstrual fluids during their periods. Neither their public statements nor activities, however, reveal the intense anxiety easily aroused in men. Contrary to girls, boys are definitely at risk: menstrual-womb blood can thwart the "biological" push into masculine maturity. Men are even at greater

risk since menstrual blood, in particular, can penetrate the urethra during coitus, bringing sickness and turning back the manliness that has been so hard won. For this reason, men say, they must remain cautious about contact with their children, too, since the latter may unwittingly transmit (cf. Meigs 1976) and infect men with the traces of their mother's body products.

The most harmful effect of women's *verbal behavior* during child-bearing is pinpointed on the boy's nose which is, next to the mouth, the body's main port of entry. Here, mother's speech and harangues have a lethal power. A woman's airstream emitted while speaking is thought to emerge from her blood-filled caverns. If it is directed—particularly at close range during anger—toward boys, the boys are believed harmed: simply by inhaling those insults and air (cf. Meigs 1978:305), a boy is defiled: the nasal orifice absorbs and stores the contaminants, henceforth blocking the free movement of circulatory blood and other fluids from the nose throughout the body. (Likewise, women pollute boys simply by lifting their legs in proximity to them, emitting vaginal smells that boys can breathe in; and, for this reason, men keep their noses plugged during coitus, avoiding incorporation of the vaginal smell they describe as most harmfully foul (see also Devereux 1937:515). Nosebleeding is *the* critical means of egesting these incorporated materials from the male body, since Sambia practice no other form of bloodletting.

Despite these necessary expurgations, however, nosebleeding is unmistakably risky, even dangerous. The reason is simple: blood loss from cuts or wounds in general is dangerous, a process that, if left unchecked, would rob one of circulatory blood and of life itself. Large cuts are handled as quickly as possible; and even with minor scrapes men are squeamish about placing bindings to stop any blood loss. (The greatest single expense in my fieldwork medical budget was for bandages—for which people constantly asked.) Blood is "vital stuff" (Lewis 1975:203): like ourselves, Sambia view the containment of blood-loss as a critical symptom of life-risk and a prognostic indicator for recovery. Birth giving and menstrual bleeding also carry a risk, but one of a different sort, since the female body is thought to "naturally" control blood flow. Thus, even though women use native medicines to reduce menstrual flows, they appear to be relatively unconcerned about their periods. Male nosebleeding is another matter. Nosebleeding is painful and the blood-loss dis-

liked: it is done to remove female contaminants. Indeed, it is unlikely that Sambia would ever use medicinal bloodletting as did our ancestors, or as do other New Guineans (Barth 1975:139; Williams 1936:342). Here, I think, is a major clue as to the psychosocial difference between nosebleeding, and menstrual periods or medicinal bleeding: one initiates a temporary bleeding inside a ready orifice to remove poisonous female matter, and it is he who rather precisely controls the amount of blood loss (cf. Lindenbaum 1976:57).

These elements of belief, namely women's innate production of blood, its association with reproduction, the contaminating potential of female blood for males, and the riskiness of blood-loss, are the background factors that generally influence—color, crystallize, constrain—the actual experience of secret nosebleeding. In their particulars, however, secular beliefs combine with subsequent ritual teachings that are introduced through transitions in the ritual life-cycle. Successive stages of initiation teaching draw on more secret, explicitly sexual elements, that reinforce the aggressive ethos of the Sambia warriorhood. It is to the system of ritual nose-bleeding behaviors that I now turn, describing the emerging contexts of ritual belief in sequence.

RITUAL NOSEBLEEDING BEHAVIOR

The nosebleeding (*chemboo-loruptu*: *chembootu*, nose; *loropina*: a verb meaning to "cleanse and expand") act is the single most painful ritual technique, by common assent of initiates and men alike. (In contrast, mere piercing of the nasal septum is a benign secular ceremony occurring in childhood for both sexes.) That feeling is understandable. Physically, nosebleeding is a penetrating trauma of the nasal mucous membranes. The psychological effect of nosebleeding is enhanced by secrecy; so its forcible administration by men upon boys—and by surprise, at that—turns into a violent assault having effects probably close to producing authentic trauma. Boys themselves often hark back to the nosebleeding with expressions such as "I feared they were going to kill me." The ritual efficacy and subjective dynamics of collective nosebleeding are highly focused on the actual blood flow. The body of assembled initiators *always* concentrate on a generous but controlled blood flow—the sight of which is greeted triumphantly with a unified

ritual/war chant. That collective action amounts to a forcible penetration of a boy's body boundaries, for, aside from its surprise and ostentatious context, the psychological impact of nosebleeding assumes greater power when it is understood that Sambia place tremendous personal emphasis on the nose, second only to the genitals: the nose is second to none in matters of body appearance, notions of beauty, and their manifestations in gender symbolism.¹

Sambia recognize two different procedures for nosebleeding that are associated with phratry affiliation. These techniques are hidden from all women and children, and from younger initiates until their ritual revelation at successive initiations. Traditionally, knowledge of the different practices was partially hidden from men of the two opposing phratries of the Sambia Valley, since the procedures are incorporeal property: ritual customs—trademarks—of the respective groups. Following pacification, however, these practices were shared with the opposite sides. Nowadays, men have some choice in the type of nosebleeding utilized in collective or private ritual.² The most common technique consists simply of thrusting stiff, sharp cane grasses into the nose until blood flows (cf. Langness 1974:194; Read 1965:131). The other technique, forcing extremely salty liquid down the nose, is also painful, but there is less severe penetration since no hard projectile is involved. In the latter instance a beastly saline solution is made from soaking water in native vegetal salt that is sponged into the nostrils as the face is held upwards. Blood instantly flows following that action most times, and profusely so, in some cases.

The cane-grass technique was used in the first-stage and third-

¹ The generic term for nose is *chembootu*; the penis is called *laakelu*; the glans penis is *laakelu chembootu*—which male idiom jokingly labels "that no good man down there (i.e., the public area) without teeth." Nose and penis associations like this one are not only consciously generalized in everyday discourse (see Herdt 1980:61-62) but unconsciously elaborated in individual dreams and cultural products like ritual symbolism and folklore.

² This report represents the ethnographic present of 1974-1976, when these data were mostly collected. Sambia say that they stopped practicing cane-swallowing (cf. Berndt 1965:84; Salisbury 1976:62) of their own volition shortly before pacification (about 1964-1965). Pacification has brought formerly hostile Sambia hamlets close together, social changes that have also resulted in sharing certain clan or phratry ritual secrets (e.g., about nosebleeding) with affines or age-mates, creating more choice in these matters. During fieldwork in 1979, I noted that most Sambia men still privately nosebled, according to their own self-reports. In contrast, however, those same men say that cane-swallowing was simply *too* dangerous, painful, and messy (they feared that the canes would break off in their stomachs and kill them); nosebleeding is much preferred.

stage collective initiations by all the Sambia groups in which I observed nosebleeding. That practice is regarded as more dangerous than the water technique, largely due to men's perception that there is always a chance that the cane-grasses might break off and lodge in one's nose, risking death—the prime reason men offer in explaining why Sambia themselves abandoned cane swallowing before pacification. Following third-stage initiation, the choice of bloodletting technique is made on the basis of phratry membership in individually oriented fifth- and sixth-stage initiations. In private nosebleeding, however, personal needs and public glory are also involved; for example, the cane-grass technique is the riskier, more daring routine, and is identified as among the most masculine of activities. Here, men's subjectivity seems to be pinpointed on the need—and pseudo-risk—of a physical, hard projectile actually penetrating the nostrils to achieve the painful and desired inward-to-outward effect of blood release. And, to reiterate, that penetrating thrust of cane-grass seems to be necessary for culturally accomplishing the first acts of efficacious nosebleeding within collective initiations.

With this background, I shall describe field observations on the first-stage nosebleeding behavior in detail; because of limited space I will then summarize the data pertaining to later initiatory nosebleeding contexts.

FIRST-STAGE INITIATION

Nosebleeding occurs on the third day of first-stage initiation as but one part of a longer sequence of manly ordeals. It is preceded by purificatory rites, collective dancing, fasting, beating rites, and a state of fatigue born of sleeplessness and constant, frighteningly unpredictable surprises. On the morning of its occurrence, the novices' mothers are sarcastically informed that their sons are to be killed, so women begin a sorrowful wailing—that is genuinely tearful or ritually stylized—according to their personal situations. The novices, too, are threateningly warned to watch out because of what lies in store. Here, the mysterious power of the flutes (heard, not yet seen) comes into play, building on and enfusing the novices' growing expectations about the elders' authority over the supernatural and themselves (see Herdt 1982). The initiates are first taken from their mothers and lodged in the ritual cult-house: several hours later

they are removed to the edge-land forest where the unexpected nosebleeding occurs.

Initially, the boys confront a massive vibrating wall of thick green foliage, a fence of young saplings tightly woven together. Pieces of red headband (a ceremonial garment) are tied up in the green mass, while inside (unseen to the novices) a chorus of bachelors shakes the trees, emitting an eerie sputtering sound associated with ritual ordeals. The effect is calculatedly bizarre: from the approaching distance one is made to experience the green mass itself as if blood were dripping from the branches. The novices plunge into that disturbing morass literally tied to the backs of their ritual sponsors, through a small opening at its center. Some scream and cry; some try to escape. But all are carried through the barricade into a muddy inner chamber, that leads only one way—into a cagelike passageway of naked saplings, tied together like a fence on both sides.³ (The passage space was barely wide enough for me to walk through.) Lined up, outside and next to the passageway, are numerous warriors holding wild ginger stalks; and as the sponsor/initiate pairs walk the gamut of the enclosure they are pounded on their legs and backs. Most of the boys cry; indeed, by the time they exit into the forest clearing (20 feet away), many look terrified. Several cry out for their mothers as the all-male audience looks on.

The initiates are then grouped around the ritual site of a small brook flowing down from a thicket. A huge crowd of men assemble, fencing in the initiates. The nosebleeders themselves take center-stage: several of them are wearing upturned pig's-tusk noseplugs (worn with the tusk points turned upwards only at war and during these rites). The men are serious; and even as their tense bodies strain forward to convey that posture some of the men actually grimace. A "strong" man, a former war-leader, steps forward and silently plunges cane-grasses down his own nose: in full view of the initiates blood streams down his face into the water. Somewhere, still out of sight, the flutes hauntingly serenade his feat. The men all respond with a piercing ritual/war chant: a signal that they want more.

³ It is with the imagery of ritual paraphernalia like this—"blood raining down," a dark cavernous entrance, and a tight narrow passageway leading into a flowing stream (where blood is expelled)—that Jungians delight in interpreting womb and birth symbolism: "unconscious universal archetypes." But notice, too, that the ritual site, like a good Hollywood director's stage set, is constructed so that its subliminal perceptual effects build mystery, sanctity (Freud 1964:67), and fear, experiences that heighten and funnel subjective excitement along this particular line to a psychosocial outcome: trauma (for the novice) or triumph (for the initiator). I am indebted to Robert J. Stoller for this suggestion.

The first boy is quickly grabbed. He struggles and shouts but is held down by three men. None of us can catch his breath before the initiator rolls up cane-grasses and, as the novice's head is held back, pushes them down repeatedly into the boy's nose. Tears and blood flow as the boy is held, and relaxed forward, over the water. Next, one and then another boy is grasped and bled. One lad tries to run away but is grabbed; as a punishment he is next bled harder and longer than the others. The next initiate resists fiercely, so four men lift him up off the ground and, while there suspended, he is nosebled. Another boy is penetrated until blood flows profusely; and after each instance of this, the collectivity of men raise the ritual/war chant time and again.

Many of the previous first-stage initiates (from an initiation held several months earlier) were also nosebled again. They stood in the wings of the group. Some resisted; others did not. But few of them resisted as fiercely as the new novices. Soon the act became almost mechanical for the initiators—the boys' clansmen, cross-cousins, and matrilineal kin.

The reactions of the boys, however, are the opposite. At first the new novices do not resist much. But after several boys defied the bleeders, others resist more. Some struggle and cry; some must be forcibly bled. The men have little pity for the lads. Those who resist are even more severely dealt with by prolonging the action and thereby brutalizing it. All of the novices (they numbered 42) are bled. Afterwards, the boys remain standing over the stream to let the blood flow. The water ensures that women will not later discover any signs of blood, and it also allows the boys to wash themselves off. Then sponsors (who did not serve as bleeders) dab the boys' noses with ferns wiping the face clean of any remaining traces of blood. An elder collects the leaves.⁴

Following the bleeding, the boys were lined up by the stream for the ritual teaching. The rhetoric described the nosebleeding as

⁴ These bloodied leaves have but one, dramatic use, vis-à-vis older men's harangues of women somewhat later, back at the dance-ground site. The initiates' mothers are cursed for their "bad" treatment (e.g., cursing) of the boys, which is said to have thwarted masculine growth and required that men "kill" the boys. The red-stained leaves are held up as evidence of the boys' deaths. On one occasion I witnessed a remarkable display at this time: a young man, holding some of the bloody leaves, became excited and agitated and, quite beside himself, ran up to and assaulted one of the mothers nearby, forcibly stuffing some of the leaves in her mouth. He fled, and immediately a large group of women turned on the men denouncing the assault. This anecdote graphically illustrates how the nosebleeding context—for one adult initiator, at least—precipitated a flurry of aggressive behavior that was permitted to be directed towards a boy's mother.

punishment for the insubordination of novices toward their fathers and elders. Pollution was also mentioned. Merumie (a respected fight leader and shaman) did the rhetorical teaching; he began by telling the novices that they must learn hospitality:

If a man visiting your hamlet comes and asks you for water, you must offer him some. You must not hide your water vessels. He ought to be given water; if there is none, you must go and fetch some, even if it is dark and raining.

Next he reprimanded the boys, saying that when they were children they made "bad talk," sassing ritual initiates. He further asserted that if the boys defied or disregarded their elders' instructions to fetch water or betel nut, they would be nosebled again, as punishment. For those acts, Merumie said, "We now pay you back." The boys are told they must "change their ways."

Merumie then lectured the boys on their mothers' harmful effects and the value of letting blood:

You [novices] have been with your mothers . . . they have said "bad words" to you; their talk has entered your noses and prevented you from growing big. Your skins are no good. Now you can grow and look nice.

A teaching about warrior aggressiveness was also performed until the first-stage initiation in 1973, at which time it was abandoned.⁵ Elders stressed that nosebleeding could help novices become more fearless during warfare. Boys were told to be "strong" and unafraid on the battlefield. They were upbraided: having been nosebled themselves, henceforth they must not fear the sign of their age-mates' or comrades' spilled blood on the battlefield. In fact, elders stressed, the sight of blood itself was to have been regarded as a challenge—to seek revenge against the responsible enemies for the loss of blood on one's own side.

SECOND-STAGE INITIATION

Nosebleeding is not performed at this event, several years later.

⁵ Elders say that this warriorhood aspect of first-stage nosebleeding teaching was abandoned in the early 1970s because it was anachronistic. Its counterpart in third-stage rites, however, is still taught. This seeming discrepancy involved the fact that third-stage initiates are older—they still remembered warfare—and, moreover, the bachelors are required to socially perform as warriors, even though war is gone.

(Likewise, no nosebleeding occurs at fourth-stage initiation.) Boys do not know that, of course, until afterwards: in each subsequent initiation they are always left wondering about that fearsome possibility until the last. Men say that the initiates, having been bled once and long separated from their mothers, are protected by other external "cleaning" rites, like those which painfully scrub the body through use of stinging-nettles. However, individual second-stage initiates may be bled at the behest of their clansmen during subsequent first-stage nosebleeding rites. In addition, and somewhat inexplicable at that, men say that the boys, who are fed pandanus fruit (ending a taboo imposed earlier at first-stage initiation), are spurred enough by its ingestion and the smearing of its crimson juice on their skins to further "grow them." Women are expressly forbidden to see those events—which secrecy also seems to help offset the need for another nosebleeding till the following initiation.

THIRD-STAGE INITIATION

This event is the last collective initiatory performance of nosebleeding performed on boys as a regional set of age-mates. Later instances are individually oriented rites. This may be one reason the context is severe, almost cruel, in its violence and physical threats. This time, however, there is a greater element of voluntary action on the part of the youths, who, having attained puberty, are accorded the status of "young men" to be betrothed. As new warriors they are expected to be brave, self-disciplined, and emotionally steadfast, even though some cannot live up to that demand. After two days of the initiation (which lasts a week), youths are assembled on a signal (not dragged into line on their ritual sponsors' backs as occurred the first time). Many of them (they told me later) suspected they were to be nosebled. While lined up, military fashion, they are thus "attacked" by older men. A line of warriors, soot-blackened and garbed "like ghosts, like enemies," encircle them, plucking bows and arrows, hooting, shouting, and feigning an ambush. There, on a hidden hillside (away from the hamlet women), without a stream, they are grasped by sponsors and men and forcibly nosebled again (cf. Newman and Boyd 1982; Tuzin 1980). Although youths are not supposed to flinch, struggle, or cry, some of them do: the terror of the experience is greater than the stamina of certain individuals to passively submit to nasal penetration. (See Table 1 on the

bilaterality of choice in this situation.) No stream should be needed for that reason: if the youths are "manly enough" they will effortlessly and with sober-faced calm allow themselves to be neatly nosebled. Their blood should carefully fall into leaves provided for their own cleansing and disposal.

The teachings of third-stage nosebleeding convey to youths, for the first time, some dangers of sexual contact—physical intimacy—with women. But that is *not* why elders tell them they were bled: after all, initiates must strictly avoid women, so the thought of illicit heterosexual intercourse is not even mentioned. Instead, youths are warned about three things: first, they must be vigilant and always ready for enemy attack; second, sexual contact with women will debilitate and make them vulnerable to death in battle; and third, they must avoid women and know that death from the angry husband and his cohorts awaits adulterous transgressors. The first element is graphically impressed on the novices by the mock attack of men posing as tribal "enemies" who administered the nosebleeding. The second element is left ominously vague, for the future. The third aspect is sanctioned by, and indexed toward, the flutes, whose cries—during the ritual—are said to represent a woman's sensuous moans as she adulterously copulates with an unwary youth. The unsuspecting youth will be killed by the cuckold and his age-mates, elders warn: obey us or suffer that fate. In other words, nosebleeding is here explicitly used as a powerful social sanction to constrain the youths' sexuality, ruling out premarital heterosexuality and ruling in homosexual activities. Indeed, it is the youths' first act of being a homosexual inseminator, at the conclusion of third-stage initiation, that is culturally regarded as an essential confirmatory act towards attaining manhood.

FIFTH-STAGE INITIATION

These events are triggered by the occurrence of menarche for the youth's young wife. Nosebleeding is its final ritual. The novice and his married age-mates engage in days of collective hunting in the forest (for possum-meat prestations bestowed on the wife's cognatic kin) while adhering to strict ingestion taboos. Bloodletting then becomes the focus of essential teachings that finally reveal the full dangers of genital-to-genital intercourse, vaginal pollution, and the subsequent dangers of wives' menstrual periods.

The novice himself is first to be nosebled as his elders and cohort look on. There is absolutely no question here of voluntary submission to the act: the youth is expected to be willing, even eager to be bled; most youths remained unflinching and frozen during the actual procedure. Any sign of fear or reticence is regarded as unmanly and inappropriate, and my observations have revealed no visible reticence. Either cane-grasses or the saline solution are acceptable techniques depending on one's phratry identification; but that decision is a matter for elders, not youths, to decide. Older men actually nosebleed the youth. Afterwards, when blood flows, the characteristic ritual/war chant is raised by the whole chorus of men. The novice's age-mates are then bled too. Older men may choose to bleed themselves or to be bled. (Younger initiates, of course, are excluded from this secret ritual advancement.) Older middle-aged men, particularly graying elders, do not usually take part, and nothing is said about this. (I have, however, seen several such men on occasion spontaneously ask to be bled.)

Elders emphasize the youth's erotic/procreative relationship to his newly menstruating wife in the following teachings. More than at fourth-stage initiation, ritual knowledge of purificatory techniques is taught so youths can protect themselves against the lethal effects of female sexual contact. Examples: special leaves may be eaten and muds smeared on the skin to strengthen the body; other leaves can be used to plug the nose; and tree bark can be chewed (and later spit out) during coitus to eliminate from one's mouth traces of female body odors and breath. The youths are especially warned to be conservative in all ways about heterosexual intercourse, and they are taught how to replace depleted semen "lost" to their wives (see Herdt 1981:249). Once again, the youths are enjoined not to be adulterous and they are warned of the fatal consequences if that rule is broken. And all of these warnings are set within the ritual prescription that, henceforth, the young man must take personal responsibility for privately nosebleeding himself alone in the forest after each of his wife's menses (regardless of whether he recently had coitus): that deadly blood must be avoided and eliminated at all costs, with scrupulous measures taken before and after each menses to avoid its contagious power.

Fifth-stage teachings also explicate a theme of hostility to women that was earlier implicit. This theme concerns making men respon-

sible, autonomous warriors, by re-directing onto women some responsibility for the "pain of nosebleeding." It is an unmanly sign of weakness (*wogaanyu*) for the youth to sit idly by while his wife menstruates. Since she is "reproductively active," elders say, a man must be "ritually active" in a way germane to her body's release of menstrual blood into his world. Men add that *they* have no other orifice with which to bleed except that of the nose. Elder authorities challenge that since the youth now has (a sexual relationship with) a wife, he must prove himself stronger, manlier, on the battlefield. That message is then referred back ominously to domestic life: since it was *because* of the wife's harmful menses that the youth had to "feel pain," he must never forget his suffering on her account. She must bear responsibility for his pain; she must learn to respect him for the warriorhood ordeals he has endured to be fully masculine for her. So, if a wife is sassy or insubordinate, or under any hint of suspicion that she is being unfaithful, a man must not spare the rod in demonstrating his ownership and power over this creature who is responsible for his smarting nose.

SIXTH-STAGE INITIATION

This nosebleeding occurs in conjunction with the birth of a man's first child. The rite again follows ceremonial hunting and other purificatory rites. It confirms final initiation into the male cult hierarchy, although the rites and feasting are repeated again for the next birth or two—confirming full status as a masculine person. The teachings center on the birth fluids and their polluting potential, and a man's need to adhere to postpartum taboos by keeping distant from the mother/infant pair. The nosebleeding behavior is somewhat different: as competent manly adults, men are now autonomous and responsible for the maintenance of their own health. Indeed, the behavioral shift from being bled by others to bleeding oneself may actually occur in this initiation since novices have a choice with regard to nosebleeding themselves. (This choice also applies to the initiate's age-mates, who are also bled.) What matters is the greater stoic demand to self-consciously nosebleed oneself as a secret masculine response in defending against the immediate danger at hand: one's own wife's birth contaminants released into the close quarters of the hamlet environs. Following this initiation, most men do not nosebleed themselves again until (some two to two

and one-half years later) they resume coitus with their wives following the child's breast-weaning. Whether induced by oneself or others, then, this nosebleeding is a "voluntary" act applauded again by the ritual/war chant accompanying the released blood.

PRIVATE NOSEBLEEDING ACTS

I have already mentioned the normative injunction that a man is personally responsible for "cleansing" his body through nosebleeding after each of his wife's periods. Here I shall simply sketch the context of those private rites that follow after fifth-stage initiation and into old age.

Private nosebleedings are highly personal acts performed alone. The morning on which a man's wife disappears to the menstrual hut (and she will never even mention this to her husband or other men), the husband also quietly leaves the hamlet compound for his own forest preserve. There he nosebleeds himself with respect to the ritual procedure of his phratry. He ingests certain leaves and tree "milk-saps," and also rubs the "milk-saps" on his body to "strengthen" it at those points he contacted his wife (i.e., penis, abdomen, navel, etc.) during coitus. Then he smears red mud on his torso and limbs. This oddly sympathetic body-painting obviously communicates to the community that he has done *something secret* in the forest; men themselves say the red mud merely "hides" the underlying white tree-sap smeared on the skin from the probing eyes of women and children. (The full significance of meaning surrounding that egested blood, the white "milk-sap" and red ochre, is complex and will be examined elsewhere.) Here, of course, we have arrived at the final regime of bloodletting behavior, and one in which the action is completely private, is "voluntary," self-induced, and is performed—or so one thinks—for the independent audience of oneself. At the same time, though, private nosebleeding depends on personal initiative and is publicly unobserved, so we should thus expect individual variation in its behavior and experience.

This latter point raises difficult questions about the experience of adult bloodletting—a subject that constitutes a fascinating "internal discourse" in male life precisely because it is so much avoided. Most men are timid and tight-lipped about private nosebleeding, even among their peers. Younger men even evince some embarrassment

about it. Such reticence seems striking and puzzling, for among their cronies men will sooner or later touch on their night's dreams, and wet dreams, body fluids (both male and female), sexual conquests or needs and even, with repugnance, female contaminants—all ritual domains except personal bleeding. (To get detailed information, I had to elicit personal accounts from informants, and usually while alone with them.) The silent message seems to be that a powerful, but vulnerable, piece of the self is secreted in that private act—an idea to which I shall later return.

What emerges from ritual rhetoric and private conversations is the view that private nosebleeding is both burdensome and painful, necessary and cathartic. All adult men are believed to regularly let blood as described above, but their emotionality differs somewhat. The fight leaders and self-conscious elders are undemonstrative and matter-of-fact about their bleedings; younger newlyweds are more exuberant, but also more squeamish. Weiyu, a close, married informant in his early 20s, deplors the fierce pain of nosebleedings; grudgingly submits to it only when absolutely unavoidable, in public, where he uses cane-grass on himself; but in private he uses the salt solution because it is less dangerous. Imano, an older, quieter, comfortable man, about 30 years old, who has two wives and definitely enjoys coitus with them, is also known as a faithful nosebleeder; he feels that the bloodlettings keep him healthy, and he generously lets blood in regular synchrony with his wives' periods. Sambia men thus engage in private bleeding for many years, till they halt coitus or their wives undergo menopause and stop having periods. In between, one hears many comments about the value of nosebleeding, but the earlier idioms about "male growth" disappear. Then, among seniors in their late 30s and 40s, men again offer, in explanation of their own continuing bloodletting, the pat remark: "I am still growing."

Men are quite explicit about the conscious intent of that idea. My informant, Tali, for instance, has said: "The woman expels her blood and you, her husband, must also expel it. If you do't, your stomach will become no good, it will swell up . . ." (cf. Meigs 1976). For that reason, he noted, "Old men continue nosebleeding until their wives stop menstruating." Unless they do, he said, they "won't grow anymore." And here is Weiyu:

It's [menstrual blood] not men's blood, but the bad talk and menstrual blood of a man's "sickly" wife. It [blood] doesn't belong to us, it belongs to the women. . . .

We say their [women's] blood and bad words enter our skin and lodge their, so we expel it [blood] from the nose.

G.H.H.: But what can you replace the blood with?

Weiyu: Nothing. We don't replace it. It's the contamination (*pulungatunys*) of women, we expel it, that's all; it shouldn't be replaced.

But eventually, as Tali said elsewhere, "Old [i.e., senile] men don't [need to] perform nosebleedings on themselves; his [sic] skin is fastened to his bones; [He thinks to himself:] 'I won't grow anymore.'" To understand that belief and the developmental transformations that lead to its expressions in adult behavior, I must interpret the whole system of ritual nosebleedings that shape male character.

RITUAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN MALE CHARACTER STRUCTURE

Although it seems clear that forcible bloodletting—administered collectively on boys—eventuates in the adult social outcome that men will voluntarily and, in private, let their own blood, the psychosocial mechanisms underlying this shift remain implicit. Nor is it clear why ceremonial bloodlettings throughout New Guinea involve extensive "ritual violence" (Tuzin 1982), "male dominance" (Langness 1974), or "ritual aggression" (Berndt 1962), and even, as among the Gahuku (Read 1965:129), "ritual exhibitionism . . . of the sexual aspects of male strength." To understand these issues in the Sambia material I shall analyze the above data with reference to several theoretical perspectives that help account for the influence of forcible nosebleeding on male personality development. Four developmental themes involving nosebleeding as cultural and behavioral controls on proximity to women (see Table 1) will be examined: (1) maternal detachment, (2) ritual aggression and obedience, (3) ritual reversals, and (4) heterosexual autonomy.

MATERNAL DETACHMENT

The great impetus of Sambia initiation concerns the physical separation of boys from women and children, followed by their irreversible insertion into exclusive male associations. This dual process is well-known from the literature (Allen 1967; Poole 1982; Whiting, Kluckhohn, and Anthony 1958). But, with few exceptions (Roheim 1942; Tuzin 1980), writers have tended not to view the

