

Banks, Devin

1. Description

- 1.1 Name of society, language, and language family: Seri people, calling themselves the Comcaac people, Seri language, relating to the Hokan language family but due to its striking difference is considered an isolate (3, 4)
- 1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): sei (4)
- 1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): Sonora coast, near Baja (4)
- 1.4 Brief history: Believed to have been among the group of people from Asia that crossed the Bering Strait, moving down the coast until settling along the Sonora coast and the Baja peninsula. (3) Until recently, people outside of Sonora did not know of their existence, mostly ignored by non-Indians. Recently they are a secluded group of expert fisherman, however their population is increasing. (1)
- 1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: The Joshua Project, population now 21% Evangelical, 80% Christian Adherents (2)
- 1.6 Ecology: Inhabiting the desert and sea the Seri/Comcaac have had a close relationship with the rugged terrain, developing a rich hunting, fishing, and gathering society. Occasionally suffering from food shortages due to the extreme desert, the vast game and sea nurtured the Seri, for example, harvesting grain from the sea. Including plants used for food and medicines the Seri have used more than 400 different varieties of plants. (3)
- 1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density: Less than 1000 but population has been increasing. The Seri live in low population density, with their nuclear family (3)

2. Economy

- 2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): After the 1960s they began purchasing food from Mexican stores, consuming beans, rice, and wheat flour but prior popular plants included mesquite seeds, amaranth, cactus fruits, and agave. (5)
- 2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: Fish, including: sea bass, mullet, groupers, snappers, sea turtles, and triggerfish (5)
- 2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?: Due to their intensive fishing, the Seri use a barbed harpoon made from cane. (5)
- 2.4 Food storage: Simple pottery that was rarely decorated (5)
- 2.5 Sexual division of production: Fishing and hunting is exclusively done by men, while women take part in basket and pottery making, and sewing. Besides this, the division of labor is not very rigid. For example, a man may gather plants and cook, while a woman may undertake ironwood carving, tasks usually done by the opposite sex. (5)
- 2.6 Land tenure: Oral tradition associates each of the former bands with a specific region, however, they did not reserve exclusive rights, probably serving more as reference points. By the mid 19th century the coast of Seri land was deemed public land, forcing the Seri to involve d with Mexican ranching and fishing (5)
- 2.7 Ceramics: Basic ceramic pottery, usually undecorated made by the women (5)
- 2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns: N/A
- 2.9 Food taboos: N/A
- 2.10 Canoes/watercraft? Due to the high importance of fishing the Seri constructed reed boats, or balsas. (3)

3. Anthropometry

- 3.1 Mean adult height (m and f): N/A
- 3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f): N/A

4. Life History, mating, marriage

- 4.1 Age at menarche (f): N/A, but had a puberty ceremony in which she would be secluded, her face painted, refraining from eating meat. (3)
- 4.2 Age at first birth (m and f): N/A
- 4.3 Completed family size (m and f): Simple nuclear family (5)
- 4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f): N/A
- 4.5 Age first marriage (m and f): N/A
- 4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: Very rare (3)
- 4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: Previously marriages would be polygynous, but now they tend to be monogamous (5)
- 4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?: Marriage negotiated by parents, but a boy may initiate the process. After the parents agree they discuss bride-price, which has become higher since the 1960s (5)

- 4.9 Inheritance patterns: Items that are not left with the body are exchanged for equivalent possessions of the hamac who performed the burial. Since contact has been made and they have gained more consumer goods the practice has been breaking down. (5)
- 4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict: N/A
- 4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals: N/A
- 4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): Their seclusion has made their marriages endogamic, and does not extend within the family, including close cousins, however recently exogamic marriages with Mexican fisherman willing to live within the community have developed (5)
- 4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these “other fathers” recognized? N/A
- 4.14 What is the belief of the mother’s role in procreation exactly? (e.g., “receptacle in which fetus grows”): N/A
- 4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)? N/A
- 4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape: N/A
- 4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin): All close kin are excluded from potential marriages, including cross cousins who are equated as siblings (5)
- 4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms? N/A
- 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring: N/A
- 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children? N/A
- 4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females: N/A
- 4.22 Evidence for couvades: N/A
- 4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older): N/A
- 4.24 Kin avoidance and respect? N/A
- 4.24 Joking relationships? N/A
- 4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations: N/A
- 4.26 Incest avoidance rules: Besides the distinction of avoiding cross cousins (5) N/A
- 4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony? Encouraged by local evangelical churches, european-style weddings have become common (5)
- 4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name? N/A
- 4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?) Tends to be within the community, possibly due to seclusion, but recently there have been out of community marriages (5)
- 4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)? Boys can initiate the relationship but parents tend to arrange the marriages (5)
- 4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who: N/A

Warfare/homicide

- 4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare: N/A
- 4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death: Occasional fights erupted but were very limited, believed that shamans were capable of killing by witchcraft. Conflict is usually generated through interpretation rather (5)
- 4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:
- 4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations): N/A but because they have been mostly secluded (3)
- 4.18 Cannibalism? N/A

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

- 5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size: Currently two large villages for the entire Seri people, the population fluctuating greatly as they move freely between them (5)
- 5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): Originally they were nomadic, occupying camps for several weeks at a time, composed of single family or up to fifteen families. (5)
- 5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): Currently the Seri has little formal structure with an informal council of men who occasionally discuss external relations. The current chief, however, has been effective in advocating Seri interests with the government (5)
- 5.4 Post marital residence: Residence is usually neological but the beginning couple may stay with the male's parents briefly (5)
- 5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense): In 1975 the Mexican government designated a strip of 56 kilometer land as Seri territory (5)

- 5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex): Men of families are limited as heads of the household, but in the past held some authority, along with a war leader during periods of military action, and shamans commanding fear and respect (5)
- 5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships: N/A
- 5.8 Village and house organization: N/A
- 5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses): N/A
- 5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere? On the ground (3)
- 5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: N/A
- 5.12 Trade:Some traded salt and hides for maize, and European goods were obtained who roamed inland, but other than this trade has been limited (5)
- 5.13 Indications of social hierarchies? Fundamentally egalitarian and the Seri value individualism (5)

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

- 6 Time allocation to RCR:Today the only regular ceremony performed is the four day girls' puberty festival (5)
- 6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): Although their primary role was healing and preventing sick the shamans could place curses and controlled the forces of good and evil. Healing was done through influence of spirits, any medicinal cures were done by regular Seri. (5)
- 6.2 Stimulants: N/A, but individuals aspiring to become shamans would go on a four day vision quest (5)
- 6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal): The girls' puberty ceremony is the most common ceremony that takes place (5)
- 6.4 Other rituals: They used to have a similar puberty festival for boys but this has not occurred since 1923, and they would perform a scalp dance, but this has not been done since conflict with the Europeans (5)
- 6.5 Myths (Creation): Icor controls the spirit of each plant, Hant caai is responsible for the creation of the world, and the Seri say he is the same deity the Mexicans call Dios (5)
- 6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): Rarely evident today, face paint was a major art form among females, but much art takes place in the form of baskets and ironwood carvings, now. Dances have not been performed since the early 1900s, but music is still important (5)
- 6.7 Sex differences in RCR:Prior there would be ceremonies fo rboth girls and boys entering puberty, but only the girls ceremony is performed today and includes the girl being isolated and subjected to taboos while the others engage in feasts, games, and signing. (5)
- 6.8 Missionary effect: The evangelical churches in the area have promoted Christianity among the Seri, including the ceremony of marriage , and many are members of the Mexican Christian church. (3, 5)
- 6.9 RCR revival:Not much a revival, ceremonies have continued besides those that have not been used since the early 1900s (5)
- 6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:Burials were performed by a hamac without a public ceremony with the family usually forgetting the deceased relatively quickly. Today funerals are more common. The afterlife transcends to the clouds and sky to a place that is similar to the present world, but nicer (5)
- 6.11 Taboo of naming dead people? N/A
- 6.12 Is there teknonymy?N/A
- 6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.) Seri religion entailed the belief in a number of malevolent spirits that were pacified by various ceremonies and rituals. Most rituals were individual and private. Today, however, the rituals are followed out of cutom rather than purpose (5)

7. Adornment

- 7.1 Body paint:Women would paint designs on their face, distinct between married women. Occasionally men would paint their face for war and spiritual protection (1)
- 7.2 Piercings: N/A
- 7.3 Haircut: Long still by some men (1)
- 7.4 Scarification: N/A
- 7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):Make colorful necklaces with shells, seeds, vertebrae, plant stems, clay beads, and flowers (3)
- 7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment: N/A
- 7.7 Sex differences in adornment: Besides the purpose of the face paint little distinction between adornment (1)
- 7.8 Missionary effect: N/A
- 7.9 Cultural revival in adornment: Very little, besides some ceremonies face paint is rarely used (5)

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:N/A

8.2 Sororate, levirate:N/A

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):N/A

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

Record traditional music on tape recorders and prefer traditional music even after Mexican exposure, (5) Ironwood carving has become a family business threatening to replace fishing as the leading industry among the people (3), Speak Spanish in varying degrees of fluency (3)

Numbered references

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