
SEX, LIES,
AND ANTHROPOLOGISTS:
MARGARET MEAD,
DEREK FREEMAN,
AND SAMOA

Paul Shankman

Before Madonna and *Sex*, before Wilt Chamberlain and his alleged twenty thousand sexual partners, before the television show "Studs," and before "900" numbers, there was Polynesia. The people of Polynesia have a reputation for sexual license, and this reputation, deserved or not, has contributed to our own fascination with the subject of sex. Our images of tropical isles, blue lagoons, and swaying palms in the beautiful South Pacific are intimately linked with ideas about sexual paradise, and numerous accounts from early explorers to modern anthropologists indicate that some Polynesian cultures fulfill at least some of our sexual fantasies. Among these cultures, Samoa is legendary. Ever since the publication of Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* in 1928, public opinion has elevated the Samoans to the heights of sexual superstardom. Mead herself felt that of all the people she studied, the Samoans had the sunniest and easiest attitudes towards sex.

Margaret Mead was no ordinary anthropologist. At the time of her death in 1978 she was the best-known anthropologist in the world; she was also America's first woman of science, and one of the three best-known women in the United States. Mead authored popular books for the reading public, wrote columns for magazines such as *Redbook*, lectured widely, and almost single-handedly turned anthropology into a household word. Almost everyone knew who Margaret Mead was, and most people knew of Samoa too, for *Coming of Age in Samoa* remained her best-known work. The islands became synonymous with casual sex under the palms. And because Mead discussed the controversial issue of sex in America, as well as in Samoa, she is often remembered by older generations as a pioneer of the sexual revolution.

No one who has read *Coming of Age in Samoa* can remain unimpressed about the seeming wisdom of Samoans in sexual matters. As Mead wrote:

...from the Samoans' complete knowledge of sex, its possibilities and its rewards, they are able to count its true value.... The Samoan girl who shrugs her shoulder over the excellent technique of some young Lothario is nearer to a recognition of sex as an impersonal force without any intrinsic validity than is the sheltered American girl who falls in love with the first man that she kisses.¹

The opportunity to experiment freely, the complete familiarity with sex and the absence of very violent preferences make her experiences less charged with possibility of conflict than they are in a more rigid and self-conscious civilization.²

For a wide audience in the 1920s and 1930s, this was a message that they wanted to hear. But was it too good to be true? If Margaret Mead and the world at large seemed convinced of the “great premarital sexual freedom” of the Samoans, there were some dissenting voices, including the Samoans themselves.

In the decades following the publication of *Coming of Age in Samoa*, Samoans began reading the book. What they read disturbed some of them, and they denounced it. In Western Samoa, where I did my fieldwork, government officials told me not to write about Samoans as Mead had. There was more to it than simple embarrassment about the alleged promiscuity of Samoans and the consequent desire not to further tarnish the image of Samoans, especially Samoan women. Some Samoans contended that Mead lied about them and sensationalized their personal lives. Contrary to Mead, they said that they place a high value on virginity prior to marriage as evidenced by the institution of the “ceremonial virgin” or *taupou*. A Samoan village’s prestige and dignity are closely tied to the chastity of the *taupou*, the marriageable daughter of a high-ranking chief. Moreover, Samoans maintain that in general they do not behave in the “free love-making” manner described by Mead. Even today, over sixty-five years after Mead left Samoa, there is still some hostility toward her.

THE MEAD/FREEMAN CONTROVERSY

More recently Mead’s work has been the subject of a scathing critique by anthropologist Derek Freeman, a scholar with a great deal of research experience in Western Samoa.³ Freeman argues that Mead’s Samoa was a myth or at least a deceptively bad piece of research authored by a young anthropologist who did little fieldwork, had a minimal understanding of Samoan culture, and who naively believed as the truth Samoan lies about their private lives. According to Freeman, Samoan girls joked about sex with a gullible young Mead for their own amusement, never realizing that what they said in jest would be published as gospel in a best-selling book.

Freeman’s depiction of Samoa is radically different from Mead’s. While for Mead there was little conflict in the islands, for Freeman Samoans are often violent and aggressive. Citing juvenile

delinquency rates and criminal statistics for the islands, Freeman found trouble in paradise. While Mead said that rape was almost nonexistent in Samoa, Freeman argued that Samoan rape rates were among the highest in the world. And Freeman found that Samoans were not promiscuous but instead puritanical, with virginity probably carried "to a greater extreme" than any culture known to anthropology.

Freeman's book was a sensation. In early 1983 headline stories of his allegations about Mead and Samoa appeared on the front pages of virtually every major American newspaper. *Time*, *Life*, *Newsweek*, and many other magazines devoted extensive coverage to what became known as the Mead/Freeman controversy. Then Freeman, a professor emeritus at Australian National University, personally toured the United States, appearing on television talk shows. The effect was electric. Although Margaret Mead could not defend herself (she had died five years earlier), American anthropologists rallied to her defense, attempting to place her work in context as the controversy riveted the attention of both public and professional audiences. They argued that *Coming of Age* was a better book than Freeman allowed.

Freeman's claims escalated. He stated that he had "staggered the establishment" and that his work had exposed a fraud in anthropology no less significant than the notorious Piltdown hoax. The tone of the controversy became increasingly negative. Samoa's sunny image was replaced by an equally misleading stereotype of islands riddled with conflict, rape, and aggression. Mead's legacy was damaged, and the credibility of anthropology itself was called into question. As one newspaper commented, "The real loser may be anthropology's reputation as a science. If its methods haven't made quantum jumps forward since Mead's day, the whole discipline might find a better home in creative literature."⁴

For the last decade the controversy has continued to rage in books, scholarly articles, documentaries, and the popular press. It has not been about a single issue but rather many different issues: the reputation of a great anthropologist, the reputation of the Samoans, the question of whether a sexual paradise exists somewhere on earth and, if so, what difference it makes. At times the controversy has tabloid qualities: sex, gossip, and sleaze. It also has the qualities of a good professional debate: expert witnesses and differing points of view. Given the emotions and publicity surrounding the controversy, though, it has sometimes been difficult to deal with the real issues involved.

*SEXUALLY PERMISSIVE
AND SEXUALLY
RESTRICTIVE SOCIETIES*

One of the issues underlying the controversy is the broad anthropological question of how we label whole societies as sexually permissive or sexually restrictive. For Mead, Samoa was sexually permissive; for Freeman, the islands are sexually restrictive. Can both anthropologists be right? Could both be wrong? And how do we know? Sexually permissive and sexually restrictive are comparative terms. They imply general criteria that would allow us to classify societies as one or the other. But what criteria would help us recognize a society as more or less sexually permissive or restrictive?

For a number of reasons, classifying societies on the basis of sexual criteria is not as easy as it seems. First, reliable data on private sexual behavior are not easy to obtain. Second, when it comes to sex, both ideals and behavior involving sex can be quite complex. Third, our own cultural biases sometimes enter into our evaluations of other cultures. And finally, cultures change over time; they are not immutable. With these cautions in mind, we can construct relatively simple criteria that will help define permissiveness and restrictiveness, and allow us a tangible if arbitrary way of examining the Samoan data. These criteria are not absolute; they are simply useful for present purposes.

In a sexually restrictive society, members of the society will not be able to engage in sexual activity prior to marriage or outside of marriage, and there will be severe punishments for violations of the rules about premarital sex, adultery, and homosexuality. On the other hand, in a sexually permissive society, members will be able to engage in sexual activity prior to marriage and outside marriage without severe punishments. Premarital sex, adultery, and homosexuality will not be strictly prohibited. In this model, permissiveness and restrictiveness are ideal types or end points on a *continuum* in which some societies may fall at either end, while others will fall somewhere in the middle, combining elements of permissiveness and restrictiveness. It is possible that different segments of the same society hold different beliefs and engage in different behavior.

To understand what a sexually restrictive society might actually look like, let us consider America during the early twentieth century, just before Mead wrote *Coming of Age in Samoa*. America then was far less permissive than it is today. People not only believed in premarital chastity but, to a surprising degree, actually practiced it. Of course, there was a double standard for men and women, but large numbers of both sexes remained chaste until marriage. At this time, less than 20 percent of marriageable women engaged in premarital sex. One reason that women remained chaste was that courtship required a gentleman to call on a lady at her family's home, often at her request. Most single women lived at home until marriage so there was constant parental supervision. Families monitored visits by suitors at home, and outings in the neighborhood were closely chaperoned. This type of courtship was widespread before modern dating and the use of cars. Only a relatively small number of young working women in major cities, as well as women in college, lived independently. It was these young women, living away from their parents, who had more opportunities for sexual experimentation.

MEAD'S SAMOA

Margaret Mead came of age in the 1920s. Although this era is known as the Roaring Twenties, America remained, to some extent, a sexually restrictive society. As a graduate student at Columbia University in New York City, Mead was interested in alternatives to a sexually restrictive America; indeed, she wrote the last two chapters of *Coming of Age in Samoa* with young Americans in mind. It was in this historical context and with this personal interest in young people's sexuality that Mead did her fieldwork in American Samoa in 1925–1926, focusing on the lives of adolescent girls. As an American territory administered by the U.S. Navy, American Samoa could hardly be considered “primitive”—the islands had long since been colonized, pacified, missionized, and incorporated into a cash economy. Nevertheless, the Manu'a group where Mead did most of her work, was remote and non-Western.

Since Mead stood only five feet, two-and-a-half inches tall and weighed ninety-eight pounds, she was smaller than many of

her Samoan adolescent friends and acquaintances. As a young female of twenty-three working in the field by herself, Mead inquired about the experience of young females. Her interviews with twenty-five adolescent girls (ranging in age from fourteen to twenty) found that twelve had heterosexual experience and seventeen had homosexual relationships. Furthermore, many young couples eloped (*avaga*) rather than being party to formal, arranged marriages involving gift exchanges between families. Young couples would begin living together after eloping, and these relationships were publicly accepted as marriages. Moreover, adultery was not unusual. Viewed in historical context, Mead's data on the sexual experience of Samoan girls suggest that Samoa would have seemed more sexually permissive than America in the 1920s. At minimum, with almost half of her Samoan girls having heterosexual experience, the islands did not seem as restrictive as America during that era.

The picture of Samoan personal life that Mead painted was not entirely rosy. The taupou, according to Mead, was closely guarded, her virginity being an asset in the forging of marital alliances between powerful chiefs. Elopement was out of the question for these girls. Furthermore, adultery by wives of high-ranking chiefs required formal ceremonial apology. Although the final two, often-quoted chapters of *Coming of Age* gloss over jealousy, conflict, and love affairs gone bad, these are documented by Mead in earlier chapters. Writing largely from the point of view of adolescent girls, Mead did not dwell on the values of adolescent boys, men, and women.

Coming of Age would probably have remained just another obscure anthropological monograph had it not been for the conscious effort by Mead and her publisher to make the book popular and accessible to the reading public. In contrast, another book about the sexual practices of the Trobriand Islanders, anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski's *The Sexual Life of Savages*, published shortly after Mead's, was much more graphic. However, that book about a truly permissive society was not written for a popular audience and, in America, little attention was paid to it. However, Mead subtitled her book "A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for *Western Civilization*" (my italics). She drew explicit moral lessons for Americans, among them that adolescence did not have to be a time of storm and stress. As the book became a best-seller and then an enduring classic, it became fair game for criticism. As the world changed and as Samoa changed,

parts of *Coming of Age in Samoa* seemed overstated and simplistic; other parts were incorrect. In the preface to the 1972 edition of the book, Mead warned her readers of the changing world and how she had not realized that what she wrote in 1928 might embarrass future generations of Samoans. For Derek Freeman, though, Mead was “fundamentally in error,” and he wanted to set the record straight.

FREEMAN'S SAMOA

Freeman was not the first to criticize *Coming of Age in Samoa*, but since 1983 he has been Mead's most vocal and relentless critic. Freeman finds fault with almost every aspect of Mead's fieldwork, from the limited time she spent in American Samoa to her allegedly inadequate linguistic skills. He also finds Mead's conclusions about Samoan adolescence “preposterous;” according to him, Samoans possess a “cult of virginity” representing a strict morality. Violations of this code invite violent retribution. Freeman makes telling points in his critique of Mead's views on Samoan sex using his own fieldwork in Western Samoa, an independent country with a population of about 160,000 people. Freeman began working in Western Samoa in 1940, continuing in the 1960s and thereafter. Like American Samoa, Western Samoa in the twentieth century could not be considered “primitive.” Indeed, for Freeman, modern Christianity is a very important influence, reinforcing restrictive sexual attitudes and behavior.

Freeman's central argument is that the cultural ideal of virginity is largely adhered to not only by the taupou but by all Samoan girls. He asserts that Samoans themselves publicly affirm the importance of virginity for all girls. On the level of values, ideals, and public morality—how Samoans say they ought to behave—Samoa seems to be a sexually restrictive society. Moreover, girls are protected as they sleep in open-sided thatched houses, surrounded by their relatives, or they are secluded at night in the village pastor's house. They are also guarded from potential seducers by their brothers, who will severely beat unwanted suitors as well as beating the girls themselves if they are found in compromising positions.

Yet if such a high value is placed on virginity, why is it that

young Samoan men want to engage in premarital intercourse? If the dominant public morality is represented by a "cult of virginity," why should it be necessary to protect virgins? The answer is that the same brothers who are supposed to protect the chastity of their sisters are themselves expected to engage in premarital intercourse and seduce someone else's sisters. Young men discuss their sexual prowess with peers, and as Freeman notes, even teach each other the use of rape in courtship. Thus there is a double standard in which men are expected to have sexual experience prior to marriage while women are not. According to Freeman, "virgins are both highly valued *and* eagerly sought after" (my italics). These values are part of a complex situation in which some girls lose their virginity prior to marriage while others remain chaste.

Freeman's own study of adolescent girls in a rural Western Samoan village found that thirty of forty-one (or about 73 percent) were virgins; he uses Mead's data showing that 53 percent of her adolescent girls were virgins as well. Although the overall percentages indicate that the majority of girls in both studies remained virgins, a substantial proportion (27 percent to 47 percent) were not. Moreover, the older the girls, the more likely they were to have heterosexual experience. Thus, Freeman found that only 40 percent of his sample remained virgins at age 19; the same pattern is true for Mead's data, as well as in our own society.

Of course, the accuracy of data on Samoan adolescent sexual experience is difficult to assess for a number of reasons. First, the public value on virginity may lead adolescent girls to deny sexual experiences (and rape), while adolescent boys exaggerate their experiences. Second, Samoans not only value virginity, they also value apparent virginity.⁵ It is important not to get caught, or at least to be able to deny the truth, given the harsh beatings that could follow. Third, the fact that girls are protected by their relatives and brothers does not necessarily preclude sexual activity. As Freeman, Mead, and others have reported, Samoan boys will engage in the risky practice of having sex inside the girl's house surrounded by her sleeping relatives. Even the pastor's protection is no guarantee that sexual activity will not occur. Finally, as Freeman comments, the value on virginity is not the same for all Samoans; it applies "less stringently to those of lower rank." What this means is that while there is a restrictive public morality for girls, there may be more going on behind the scenes than cultural ideals permit.

CULTURAL IDEALS AND ACTUAL BEHAVIOR

Anthropologists other than Mead and Freeman who have recently worked in rural Samoa have found that villagers are neither entirely restrictive or permissive. There is a general consensus that restrictive cultural ideals and some permissive private behavior co-exist. Bradd Shore, for example, found the ideal of chastity very important to Samoans; however, it was an ideal that frequently remained unrealized, and premarital sex, carefully hidden, was "not uncommon."⁶

Penelope Schoeffel and her Samoan husband, Malama Meleiseā, also note the value of virginity for Samoans, but confirm the existence of secret affairs. They write:

Freeman disputes the testimony of Mead's informants on the grounds that sexual topics are not freely discussed by Samoans and that her informants deliberately duped her with their accounts. Schoeffel's field notes suggest, to the contrary, that Mead was not duped and that clandestine love affairs, not dissimilar to those related by Mead, are not in the least uncommon. But the crucial point is that they are clandestine, and as Freeman points out, severely punished if they become publicly known. The general Samoan attitude is that, without careful surveillance, adolescent girls and boys will engage in illicit sexual relations.⁷

Anthropologist Lowell Holmes reaches essentially the same conclusion based on his restudy of Mead's work in the Manu'a group; prohibitions on adolescent sexual activity exist, but sexual activity takes place nevertheless.⁸ While Samoans were reluctant to publicly discuss sexual matters, Holmes found that, "Judging by the number of illegitimate children in Ta'u village when I was there, and by the fact that divorce frequently involved claims of adultery, I would conclude that, while Samoans are far from promiscuous, they are not the puritanical prudes that Freeman paints them to be."⁹ Nonanthropologist Fay Calkins's very readable account of Samoan personal life also confirmed that, despite sexual surveillance and punishment, premarital sex and adultery occurred

regularly.¹⁰ The strategies for circumventing public morality and girls' reluctance are described in some detail by Freeman, Richard Goodman¹¹ and Tim O'Meara.¹²

While premarital sex and adolescent sex are sometimes viewed as identical, sex can occur after adolescence but prior to marriage. Most Samoan men and many Samoan women do not marry until their early to mid-twenties, so women can still lose their chastity after adolescence but before marriage. Although Freeman notes that the dream of every high-ranking Samoan is a formal church wedding approved by both families with the girl's virginity intact, he tells us that "this dream is not very commonly realized among the population at large."¹³ Instead, the vast majority of young men and women marry by elopement or *avaga*, a practice not encouraged by the church. As a result, "a few girls remained virgins until they married in a religious ceremony," but most "lost the status of virgin by eloping with the man who succeeded in deflowering them" either by persuasion or force.¹⁴

Sex, and especially pregnancy, are considered shameful for girls outside the context of marriage, but this shame can be avoided by elopement. In many cases, according to Freeman, a girl may encourage a boy to have sex with her in order to secure a marriage by elopement, thereby legitimating a secret relationship.¹⁵ But these relationships are not without problems. The young men may want only sex, or may wish to humiliate the girl and her family. Or the girl may wish to shame her own family with a child born out of wedlock. Bitter hostilities between families can result. These permutations occur in our own society and should be familiar to viewers of talk shows such as "Oprah" or "Geraldo."

The existence of adolescent and premarital sex does not mean that they are publicly acceptable; in fact, they are clandestine. But they do indicate that cultural *beliefs* about virginity and proper conduct cannot by themselves explain the actual pattern of sexual behavior—what people really do. The difference between ideals and behavior is true for us as well. A recent comprehensive Kinsey survey found that most Americans still do not approve of premarital sex; the percentage of the population expressing disapproval has hardly changed in the last twenty years.¹⁶ Yet during that same period, a very real "sexual revolution" has occurred. The percentage of American women who remained virgins during adolescence dropped dramatically from about 70 percent in the early 1970s to about 40 percent by the late-1980s.

Today the percentage who remain virgins until marriage is less than 10 percent. Thus cultural ideals about sexual conduct and actual behavior can be quite different and even contradictory.

THE CHANGING TAPOU SYSTEM

Another way of viewing the interplay between cultural ideals and actual behavior is to look at the taupou system as it changed under colonial rule and missionary influence. Prior to Western contact, Samoan chiefs could have several wives (polygyny), and marriages of taupous were essential for forging political alliances useful in warfare. However, well before the turn of the twentieth century, many of the conditions that supported the taupou system had changed. Warfare was suppressed, and polygyny was replaced by monogamy. Alliances cemented with the marriage of a taupou were no longer vital, and each chief could no longer marry several taupous.

Under these changing conditions, taupous declined in number and their virginity became less valuable. In the late nineteenth century, many taupous were actually eloping with their lovers rather than waiting for their families to arrange marriages. The great German ethnographer Augustine Krämer, who inquired in some detail about taupous, stated, "I was given with the name of nearly every taupou, about whom I enquired, the names of chiefs' sons with whom they had run away under the pretext of marriage; but generally they came back again in three days."¹⁷ Thus, long before Mead or Freeman ever went to Samoa, the role and behavior of the taupou were changing.

The declining political significance of the taupou continued in the twentieth century. Felix Keesing, an anthropologist who worked in the islands shortly after Margaret Mead, found that in a number of villages, taupous were viewed as an expensive luxury, and in many villages, chiefs who had the traditional right to appoint a taupou were simply not doing so. Where taupous were appointed, their roles were more limited than in the pre-contact period. While the ideal of virginity remained, the taupou system itself was in a state of practical decay.

Perhaps the most far-reaching changes in Samoan sexual behavior came during World War II. In Western Samoa, tens of

thousands of American troops were stationed throughout the islands. Some chiefs appointed taupous to entertain servicemen, although some of these girls may not have been virgins. More significantly, during this period, there were many relationships between Samoan women and American men. A number of Samoan parents actively encouraged their daughters and servicemen to live together openly when the men were off duty. While intermarriage and cross-ethnic relationships had occurred throughout the colonial period, these wartime romantic relationships, sometimes producing children, were more widespread. Such changes in Samoan personal life indicate that Samoan conduct was not static and timeless, but dynamic and quite variable.

A MORE COMPLEX SAMOA

Although we have barely scratched the surface of the private lives of Samoans, the picture is not a simple one—black or white, sexually permissive or sexually restrictive, Mead's or Freeman's. There is a restrictive public morality, but there is also a double standard that not only permits but actually encourages boys and men to engage in sexual activity outside of marriage, yet requires restraint and modesty for girls and young women. For many adolescent girls of lower rank, the strict values of the taupou system are not as pressing as they are for daughters of higher rank, and premarital sex may occur. The system thus has elements of restrictiveness and permissiveness, depending to a large extent on whether we are looking at public morality or private behavior, younger or older adolescents, high or low rank, or men versus women. These distinctions make a difference in the way we look at the data. In addition, the taupou system itself has changed a good deal over the last 150 years and is no longer the central institution that it once was. Events such as World War II significantly affected sexual behavior. Differences between American Samoa and Western Samoa, and rural as opposed to urban settings, can also affect sexual behavior.

How does Samoa compare to other cultures? As we have seen, by American standards of the 1920s Samoa may have seemed permissive; by today's American standards, Samoa seems restrictive. As our own standards change, the islands are no

longer as “sexy” as they once appeared. In cross-cultural perspective, Samoa falls somewhere in the middle on a continuum between the most permissive and most restrictive societies.¹⁸ The data on sex in other cultures that anthropologists have amassed over the last several decades suggest that Samoa is neither as permissive as it seemed to Mead in her day or as restrictive as it seems to Freeman today.

What of Freeman’s claim that virginity in Samoa is carried probably to “a greater extreme” than any culture known to anthropology? There can be little doubt that more restrictive societies are found in other parts of the world. One need only consider “honor deaths” that currently occur in some Middle Eastern cultures. Girls who may simply be associating with boys but are not necessarily involved with them are murdered by family members to protect the family’s honor. In certain east African cultures, girls are infibulated, that is, their vaginas are literally sewn up until marriage to protect their virginity. Closer to our own culture, anthropologist John Messenger describes the sexual behavior of a small Catholic community in Ireland where premarital sex, adultery, and homosexuality were unknown—not simply prohibited, but unheard of in practice!¹⁹ In comparison to these extreme cases, Samoa looks less restrictive. On the other hand, more permissive societies can be found in many parts of the world, including parts of Polynesia and Melanesia, for instance, Tahiti, the Cook Islands, or the Trobriand Islands.

CONCLUSIONS

In this brief chapter, we have seen how the Mead/Freeman controversy could easily descend into a war over personal reputations, leading to professional name-calling, public confusion, and general skepticism about anthropology’s ability to keep its house in order. Simple caricatures of Samoa became the stuff of controversy. We have also seen, though, that anthropologists can focus on real issues such as sexual permissiveness and restrictiveness that involve real data and explicit comparisons across cultures and over time. In comparative perspective, Samoa is not the extreme case that Mead and Freeman thought it was. As interesting as it is, Samoa falls somewhere in the middle with a good deal

of evidence supporting the position that there is a restrictive public sexual morality coupled with some permissive behavior. If this less exciting but more complex position means that the thrill is gone from the controversy, we may have learned something.

And what of the Samoans? How do they see the controversy today? After all, Samoa does not belong to Margaret Mead or Derek Freeman or any other anthropologist; it belongs to the Samoans. Despite all the publicity, for most Samoans today the controversy has very little to do with their lives. In the 1990s most Samoans do not live in the isolated villages that Mead and Freeman studied, but in more modern, urban environments where the social constraints of village life are less evident. Almost half of Western Samoa's population lives in and around the port town of Apia. Moreover, about 40 percent of the total Western Samoan population has migrated to New Zealand, Hawaii, the U.S. mainland, and American Samoa. As for American Samoans, over 60 percent have migrated to the United States. This massive exodus reflects the very real problems of low income and limited opportunities in the islands. Many Samoans view our interest in their sex lives as a sideshow to the real problems they face on small islands with limited resources and growing populations. On their VCRs, Samoans remaining in the islands watch R-rated American videos complete with sex and violence, and they wonder about what kind of people *we* are.

Meanwhile, our own search for sexual paradise continues. Almost monthly we are bombarded by new surveys indicating that more Americans are engaged in more kinds of sex with more partners at earlier ages than ever before. But have we found paradise? Will we find it? Or will we continue to wander in a sexual wilderness that provides no clear signposts and only hazy directions? Margaret Mead thought that an increasing knowledge of sex would lead to a clearer appreciation of its true value, to less confusion and conflict about sex, and presumably to better relationships. It is now over six decades since *Coming of Age in Samoa* was published and more than two decades since the sexual revolution of the 1960s began. We certainly know more about ourselves and about other cultures than we did, but has this knowledge led to better understanding and better relationships among ourselves? Can it do so? While we can resolve some of the issues in the Mead/Freeman controversy, for our own culture there are still many unanswered, and perhaps unanswerable, questions when it comes to matters of sex, love, and romance.

NOTES

1. Margaret Mead, *The Coming of Age in Samoa* (New York: Morrow, 1928), p. 222.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 160.
3. Derek Freeman, *Margaret Mead and Samoa: the Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).
4. *Denver Post*, February 15, 1983.
5. Bradd Shore, *Sala'ilua: A Samoan Mystery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 234–235.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 229–230.
7. Penelope Schoeffel and Malama Meleiseā, “Margaret Mead, Derek Freeman, and Samoa: The Making, Unmaking, and Remaking of an Anthropological Myth,” *Canberra Anthropology* 69, no. 1 (1984): 58–69.
8. Lowell D. Holmes and Ellen Rhoads Holmes, *Samoa Village Then and Now*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Javonovich, 1992), p. 90.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 143.
10. Fay Calkins, *My Samoan Chief* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1962).
11. Richard Goodman, *Mead's Coming of Age in Samoa: A Dissenting View* (Oakland, CA: Pipperine Press, 1993).
12. Tim O'Meara, *Samoa Planters: Traditional and Economic Development in Polynesia* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1991).
13. Freeman, *Margaret Mead and Samoa*, p. 241.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 240.
15. *Ibid.*
16. Albert D. Klassen et al., *Sex and Morality in the U.S.* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989).
17. Felix M. Keesing, “The Taupou System of Samoa: A Study of Institutional Change,” *Oceania* 8, no. 1 (1937): 1–14.
18. Alice Schlegel, “Status, Property, and the Value of Virginitly,” *American Ethnologist* 18 (1991): 719–734.
19. John C. Messenger, “Sex and Repression in an Irish Folk

Community," in D. S. Marshall and R. C. Suggs, eds., *Human Sexual Behavior* (New York: Basic Books, 1971), pp. 3–37.

SUGGESTED READINGS

- Calkins, Fay. *My Samoan Chief*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1962. An insightful look at village life through the eyes of an American woman married to a Samoan.
- Freeman, Derek. *Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983. The major critique of Mead's work in Samoa.
- Mead, Margaret. *The Coming of Age in Samoa*. New York: Morrow, 1928. A classic, and the reason for the Mead/Freeman controversy.
- O'Meara, Tim. *Samoa Planters: Tradition and Economic Development in Polynesia*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1991. A fine study of contemporary village life in Western Samoa.
- Rubin, Lillian B. *Erotic Wars*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1990. A perceptive examination of America's sexual revolution.

Margaret Mead and Samoa book. Read 4 reviews from the world's largest community for readers. In 1928 Margaret Mead announced her stunning discovery of a ...¹ And the real kicker is that apparently scientists and anthropologists are still sort of defending Mead anyway, saying that most of her work was reliable. Seems to me Freeman has been poo-pooed a bit as well. So I sort of feel like everyone is lying to me right now. Nasty, nasty people, those scientists. Could Mead have done better research? Margaret Mead visiting with a Samoan family in her later years. Tomste1808 on Wikimedia Commons.² Her biggest critic was the anthropologist Derek Freeman. Freeman devoted his life to discrediting Mead, spending years in Samoa and publishing several books and articles in a controversy that lasted three decades. However, Freeman's claims were later shown to be unsubstantiated.³ However, the interview was arranged by Fofoa's son, a Samoan Christian who asked her to correct the lies and insults about Samoan sexuality in Mead's book. Yet, Mead's field notes did not have any information on sex from the two women. She couldn't have been misled by information she didn't have in the first place. (2) Turning away from genetic determinism. Derek Freeman, 1917 - 2001 Derek Freeman was born in 1917 in New Zealand, and from a very young age was interested in anthropology, tantalized by Margaret Mead's sojourns to Samoa. In 1940, Freeman traveled to Samoa and lived among the natives for three years where he taught and studied the culture. It was during this first trip, that Freeman began to doubt whether Mead's original research was in fact accurate. The Samoans he encountered did not resemble at all the culture that she had described. He continued his education with two years of graduate study on Samoa at London University