

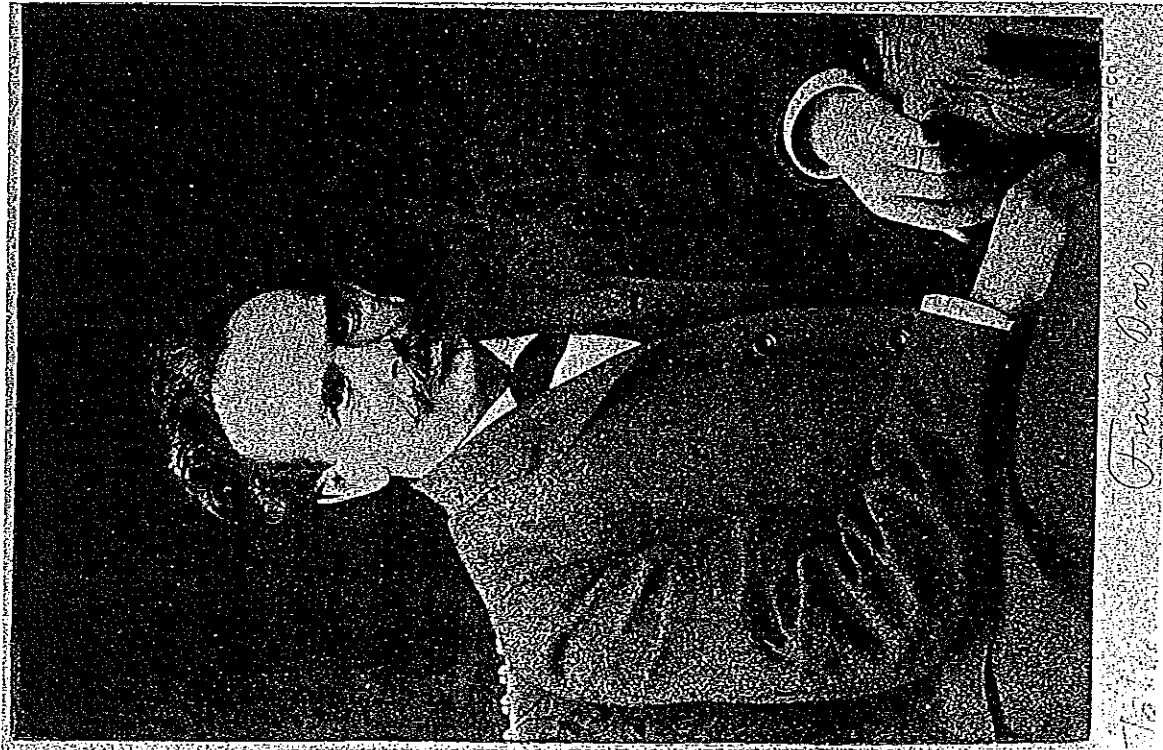
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**MARGARET
MEAD**
AND
SAMOA
The Making and Unmaking
of an Anthropological Myth
DEREK FREEMAN

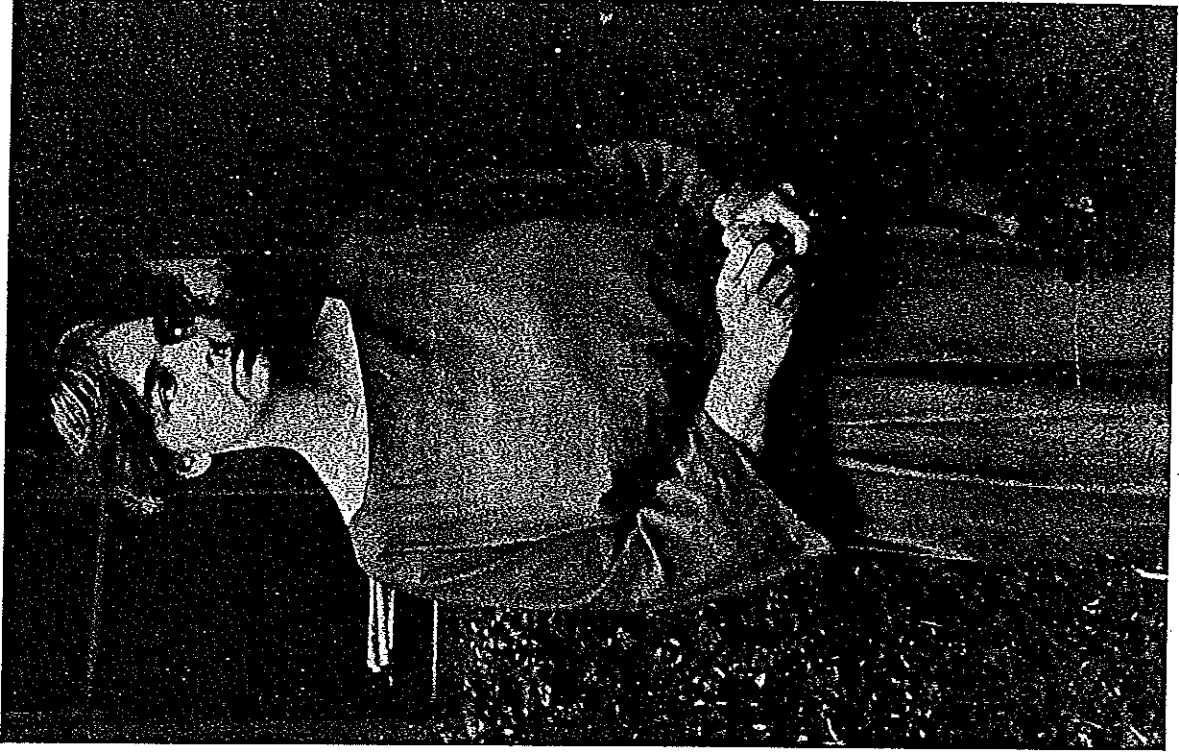
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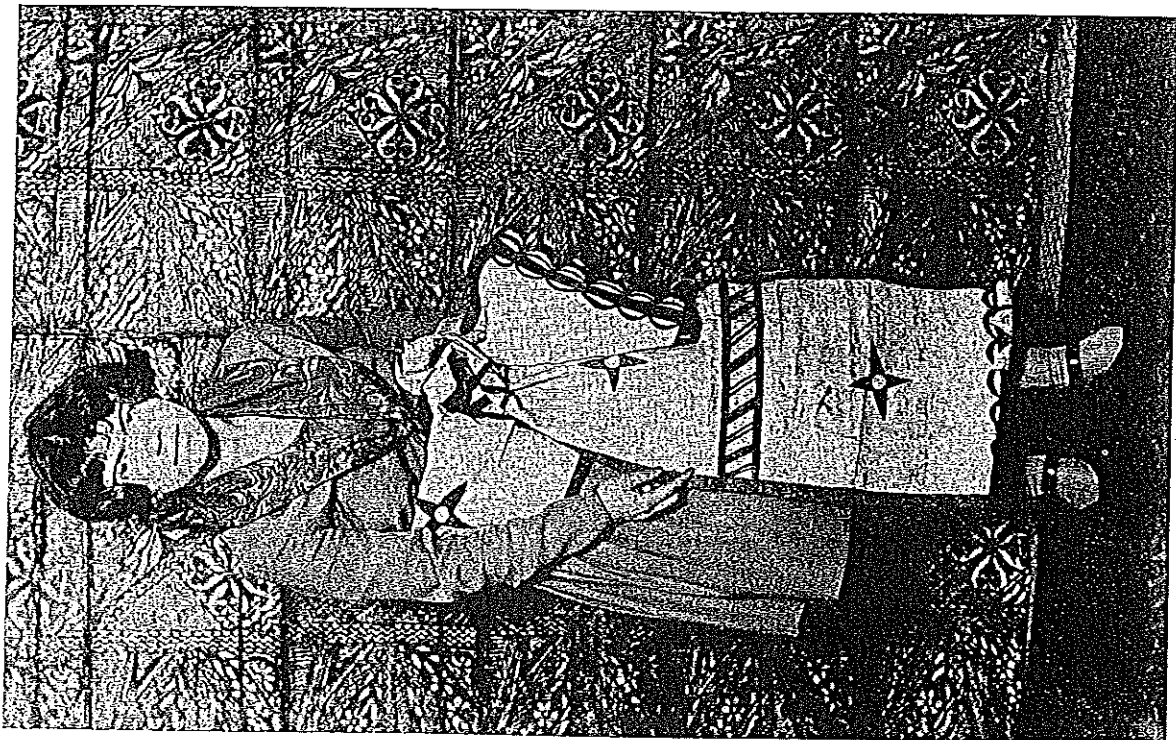
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Franz Boas in 1906.



Ruth Benedict in about 1925.



Margaret Mead in the late 1920s.

Preface

BY FAR the most widely known of Margaret Mead's numerous books is *Coming of Age in Samoa*, based on fieldwork on which she embarked in 1925 at the instigation of Franz Boas, her professor at Columbia University. Boas had sent the 23-year-old Mead to Samoa to study adolescence, and she returned with a startling conclusion. Adolescence was known in America and Europe as a time of emotional stresses and conflicts. If, Mead argued, these problems were caused by the biological processes of maturation, then they would necessarily be found in all human societies. But in Samoa, she reported, life was easy and casual, and adolescence was the easiest and most pleasant time of life. Thus in anthropological terms, according to Mead, Samoa was a 'negative instance'—and the existence of this one counterexample demonstrated that the disturbances associated

with adolescence in the United States and elsewhere had cultural and not biological causes. In the controversy between the adherents of biological determinism and those of cultural determinism, a controversy that was at its height in the 1920s, Mead's negative instance appeared to be a triumphant outcome for believers in the sovereignty of culture.

When *Coming of Age in Samoa* was published in 1928 it attracted immense attention, and its apparently conclusive finding swiftly entered anthropological lore as a jewel of a case. Since that time Mead's finding has been recounted in scores of textbooks, and through the vast popularity of *Coming of Age in Samoa*, the best-selling of all anthropological books, it has influenced the thinking of millions of people throughout the world. It is with the critical examination of this very widely accepted conclusion that I am concerned in this book.

Scientific knowledge, as Karl Popper has shown, is principally advanced through the conscious adoption of "the critical method of error elimination." In other words, within science, propositions and theories are systematically tested by attempts to refute them, and they remain acceptable only as long as they withstand these attempts at refutation. In Popper's view, "in so far as a scientific statement speaks about reality it must be falsifiable," and rational criticism entails the testing of any particular statement in terms of its correspondence with the facts. Mead's classing of Samoa as a negative instance obviously depends on the adequacy of the account of Samoan culture on which it is based. It is thus very much a scientific proposition, for it is fully open to testing against the relevant empirical evidence.¹

While the systematic testing of the conclusions of a science is always desirable, this testing is plainly imperative when serious doubts have been expressed about some particular finding. Students of Samoan culture have long voiced such doubts about Mead's findings of 1928. In this book I adduce detailed empirical evidence to demonstrate that Mead's account of Samoan culture and character is fundamentally in error. I would emphasize that I am not intent on constructing an alternative ethnography of Samoa. Rather, the evidence I shall present has the specific

purpose of scientifically refuting the proposition that Samoa is a negative instance by demonstrating that the depictions on which Mead based this assertion are, in varying degree, mistaken.

In undertaking this refutation I shall limit my scrutiny to those sections of Mead's writings which have stemmed from, or refer to, her researches on Samoa. My concern, moreover, is with the scientific import of these actual researches and *not* with Margaret Mead personally, or with any aspect of her ideas or activities that lies beyond the ambit of her writings on Samoa. I would emphasize also that I hold in high regard many of the personal achievements of Margaret Mead, Franz Boas, and the other individuals certain of whose assertions and ideas I necessarily must question in the pages that follow.

According to Mead, the making of her study of adolescence in Samoa was an accident of history. It is also by an accident of history that I have come to write this book. In the late 1930s, at Victoria University College in Wellington, New Zealand, I chanced to become a student of Ernest Beaglehole, who had studied anthropology at Yale under Edward Sapir, a former student of Franz Boas. Beaglehole's anthropology was very similar to Mead's, and it was this approach, stemming from the teaching of Boas, that I had adopted when, with Beaglehole's encouragement, I decided to do ethnographic research in the Samoan islands. When I reached Western Samoa in April 1940, I was very much a cultural determinist. *Coming of Age in Samoa* had been unreservedly commended to me by Beaglehole, and my credence in Mead's findings was complete.

After two years of study, during which I came to know all the islands of Western Samoa, I could speak Samoan well enough to converse in the company of chiefs with the punctilio that Samoan etiquette demands, and the time had come to select a local polity for intensive investigation. My choice was Sa'anapu, a settlement of 400 inhabitants on the south coast of Upolu. On my first visit to Sa'anapu I had become friendly with Lauvi Vainu'u, a senior talking chief. When I arrived to begin my researches I learned of the death of Lauvi's youngest son, Fa'imoto. Lauvi had been deeply attached to Fa'imoto, and he

experienced my return as reparation for his loss. He had decided, he told me, that I was to become his adopted son. From that time onward I lived as one of the Lauvi family whenever I was in Sa'anapu.

In my early work I had, in my unquestioning acceptance of Mead's writings, tended to dismiss all evidence that ran counter to her findings. By the end of 1942, however, it had become apparent to me that much of what she had written about the inhabitants of Manu'a in eastern Samoa did not apply to the people of western Samoa. After I had been assured by Samoans who had lived in Manu'a that life there was essentially the same as in the western islands, I realized that I would have to make one of the objectives of my research the systematic testing of Mead's depiction of Samoan culture.

Soon after I returned to Sa'anapu its chiefs forgathered one morning at Lauvi's house to confer on me one of the chiefly titles of their polity. I was thus able to attend all *fono*, or chiefly assemblies, as of right, and I soon came to be accepted by the community at large. From this time onward I was in an exceptionally favorable position to pursue my researches into the realities of Samoan life.

By the time I left Samoa in November 1943 I knew that I would one day face the responsibility of writing a refutation of Mead's Samoan findings. This would involve much research into the history of early Samoa. This task I began in 1945 in the manuscript holdings of the Mitchell Library in Sydney and later continued in England, where I thoroughly studied the Samoan archives of the London Missionary Society.

During 1946-1948, while studying anthropology at the University of London, I wrote a dissertation on Samoan social organization, and my intention was to return to Polynesia. There then came, however, the opportunity to spend some years among the Iban of Borneo. With this diversion, which later took me to Cambridge University to complete my doctoral studies and then in new anthropological directions, the continuation of my Samoan researches was long delayed.

I finally returned to Western Samoa, accompanied by my wife and daughters, at the end of 1965. Sa'anapu, now linked to

Apia by road, was once again my center of research. The chiefs of Sa'anapu immediately recognized the title they had conferred on me in 1943, and I became once again an active member of the Sa'anapu *fono*. My family and I remained in Samoa for just over two years, making frequent visits elsewhere in the district to which Sa'anapu belongs, as also to numerous other parts of the archipelago, from Saua in the east to Falealupo in the west.

Many educated Samoans, especially those who had attended college in New Zealand, had become familiar with Mead's writings about their culture. A number of them entreated me, as an anthropologist, to correct her mistaken depiction of the Samoan ethos. Accordingly, early in 1966 I set about the systematic examination of the entire range of Mead's writings on Samoa, seeking to test her assertions by detailed investigation of the particulars of the behavior or custom to which they referred. I also investigated, with the permission of the prime minister of Western Samoa, confidential court and police records, an invaluable source of data on crucial aspects of the aggressive and sexual behavior of Samoans, including that of adolescents.

Sa'anapu, it so happens, was founded in ancient times by migrants from the island of Ta'u, the main site of Mead's researches in 1925-1926. Taking advantage of this fact, in 1967 I organized a formal traveling party to Ta'u. We visitors were received as long-lost kinsmen, and in the company of chiefs from both Ta'u and Sa'anapu I was able to review all those facets of Mead's depiction of Samoa which were then still at issue. In Ta'u I also recorded the testimony of men and women who remembered the period to which Mead's writings refer. In many instances these recollections were vivid and specific; as one of my informants remarked, the happenings of the mid 1920s were still fresh in their memories.

As my inquiries progressed it became evident that my critical scrutiny of Mead's conclusions would have to extend to the anthropological paradigm of which *Coming of Age in Samoa* was a part. In order to comprehend the circumstances that had prompted Boas to send Mead to Samoa I would have to investigate not only the history of anthropology but that of biology as

well, and in particular the interaction of biological and anthropological ideas from the time of Darwin's *Origin of Species* onward. Because it was imperative to consult the relevant primary sources, this investigation occupied me intermittently for more than a decade.

The account of the interrelated histories of biological and anthropological ideas that I give in Chapters 1-4 of this book provides a background essential for understanding the way the ideology and projects of Francis Galton and his followers in the eugenics movement produced a reaction by anthropologists and others that culminated in the frenetic nature-nurture controversy of the mid 1920s. A knowledge of these ideological developments of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is also necessary for understanding the pivotal significance of Mead's Samoan researches for the school of American anthropologists led by Franz Boas and Alfred Kroeber, which from 1917 onward was committed to a doctrine of extreme cultural determinism. This book, then, while primarily given to the refutation of the general conclusion that Mead drew from her Samoan researches, is also concerned with examining related aspects of the wider myth of absolute cultural determinism, and with arguing that this now antiquated doctrine should be abandoned in favor of a more scientific anthropological paradigm.

My researches were not completed until 1981, when I finally gained access to the archives of the High Court of American Samoa for the 1920s. Thus my refutation of Mead's depiction of Samoa appears some years after her death. In November 1964, however, when Dr. Mead visited the Australian National University, I informed her very fully, during a long private conversation, of the empirical basis of my disagreement with her depiction of Samoa. From that time onward we were in correspondence, and in August 1978, upon its first completion, I offered to send her an early draft of my refutation of the conclusions she had reached in *Coming of Age in Samoa*. I received no reply to this offer before Dr. Mead's death in November of that year.

In September 1981 I returned to Western Samoa with the specific purpose of submitting a draft of this book to the critical

scrutiny of Samoan scholars. Chapters 5 to 19 were meticulously checked by Le Tagaloa Leota Pita of the University of Samoa. From Western Samoa I traveled to Tutuila and Manu'a for discussions with other knowledgeable Samoans, whose comments I have also taken fully into account. In the course of the refutation of Mead's misleading account of their culture, which many Samoans encouraged me to undertake, I have had to deal realistically with the darker side of Samoan life. During my visit of 1981 I found among contemporary Samoans both a mature appreciation of the need to face these realities and a clear-headed pride in the virtues and strengths of the Samoan way of life.

The chapters that follow, then, are based on investigations that have extended, off and on, over some forty years, including six years spent in Samoa and even longer in the research libraries of Australia, New Zealand, England, and the United States. My work in Samoa during the years 1965-1968 and again in 1981 was carried out from the Research School of Pacific Studies of the Institute of Advanced Studies of the Australian National University; it is the exceptional opportunity for research provided by this institute that has enabled me to explore the history of both anthropology and biology, and to bring to fruition this study of a major twentieth-century myth. It is a study that bears on problems of the greatest anthropological importance and that will, I hope, contribute constructively to their solution.

these special characteristics she had perceived, as she noted in the introduction to *Coming of Age*, to "give a picture of the whole social life of Samoa." It was Mead's view in 1925 that a trained student could "master the fundamental structure of a primitive society in a few months," and, supposing the Samoans to have a "very simple society," she had no compunction, despite the cursorness of her inquiries, in constructing her own picture of Samoan culture and character.¹

It is with the scientific adequacy of Mead's picture of Samoan society that I shall be concerned from now on, for to the extent that this picture is defective, Samoa ceases to be a negative instance and Mead's central conclusion that culture, or nurture, is all-important in the determination of adolescent and other aspects of human behavior is revealed as ungrounded and invalid.

In chapter 13 of *Coming of Age in Samoa*, having announced her conclusion that in the case of adolescent behavior "we cannot make any explanations in terms of the process" and must therefore look wholly to the "social environment" for an answer, Mead at once went on to outline the aspects of Samoan life that "irremediably affect" the life of the Samoan girl. "The Samoan background," she wrote,

which makes growing up so easy, so simple a matter, is the general casualness of the whole society. For Samoa is a place where no one plays for very high stakes, no one pays very heavy prices, no one suffers for his convictions, or fights to the death for special ends. Disagreements between parents and child are settled by the child's moving across the street, between a man and his village by the man's removal to the next village, between a husband and his wife's seducer by a few fine mats. Neither poverty nor great disasters threaten the people to make them hold their lives dearly and tremble for continued existence. No implacable gods, swift to anger and strong to punish, disturb the even tenor of their days. Wars and cannibalism are long since passed away, and now the greatest cause for tears, short of death itself, is a journey of a relative to

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Mead's Depiction of the Samoans

DURING THE LAST FEW MONTHS of her fieldwork in Manu'a, Mead turned, as we have seen, to the general study of Samoan society. With the information she collected during this period, supplemented by her reading of the earlier literature on Samoa, she produced *Social Organization of Manu'a*, which she dedicated to Ruth Benedict. Mead's general study of Samoan society and culture was also of quite crucial significance for the argument she presented in *Coming of Age in Samoa*. As we have already seen, rather than attempting a direct study of the interrelation of cultural and biological variables, Mead followed the course of presenting Samoan society as a negative instance, that is, as a society with special characteristics that had resulted in the disappearance of the disturbance at adolescence that tends to occur elsewhere in human populations. In defining

another island. No one is hurried along in life or punished harshly for slowness of development. Instead the gifted, the precocious, are held back, until the slowest among them have caught the pace. And in personal relations, caring is as slight. Love and hate, jealousy and revenge, sorrow and bereavement, are all matters of weeks. From the first months of life, when the child is handed carelessly from one woman's hands to another's, the lesson is learned of not caring for one person greatly, not setting high hopes on any one relationship.²

Elsewhere in her writings, Mead elaborates this picture of the background that, for Samoans, "makes growing up so easy," the leitmotif of her depiction being the notion of *ease*. Samoan life, she claims, is above all else "characterized by ease"; Samoan society is "replete with easy solutions for all conflicts." She remarks, for example, on "the ease with which personality differences can be adjusted by change of residence," on "the easy acceptance of innovation," and on a prevailing "ease in sex relations." Adolescence is "the age of maximum ease," and Samoans develop into "easy, balanced human beings" in a society that "emphasizes a graceful, easy, diffuse emotional life, a relaxed dependence upon reliable social forms."³

This picture of an easeful society was powerfully conveyed in the chapter immediately following the introduction to *Coming of Age*. Entitled "A Day in Samoa," it was originally written for inclusion in *Social Organization of Manu'a*, in the section on which Mead worked in close collaboration with Benedict. It was, however, judged to be "too literary" for this monograph, and in 1928 it became part of the text of *Coming of Age*. This piece of writing has been frequently republished, and Mead herself in 1965 gave it prominence in *Anthropologists and What They Do* as giving an idea of "the whole gentle rhythm of life" in Samoa. Her beguiling vignette begins at dawn as lovers slip home from trysts beneath slender palms at the edge of the gleaming sea, and ends long past midnight, with the mellow thunder of the reef and the whispering of lovers as the village rests before another golden dawn. The sole disturbing element

is the death of a relative in another village; and there is no hint of the grim realities, as, for example, the violent quarrels, the punishments, the jealousies, the insults, and the disturbed emotional states that are as much a part of Samoan existence as the alluring features of which Mead's "A Day in Samoa" is so artfully compounded.⁴

The further depiction that Mead gives of Samoan character stems directly from her account of the pervasive ease of the Samoan way of life. Samoans, so Mead would have it, display a "lack of deep feeling" and "no strong passions." Children, before age six or so, have "learned never to act spontaneously, even in anger, but always after reviewing the social scene." After thus acquiring "a relaxed dependence on reliable social forms," the individuals reared in Samoan society, according to Mead, have "a peaceful harmonious development which holds few situations for conflict." The minds of adolescents being "perplexed by no conflicts," there is among Samoans an "absence of psychological maladjustment." Indeed, in discussing the adolescent girls of whom she made a detailed study, Mead claims that in almost all cases the benign social environment in which they had grown up had resulted in "a perfect adjustment." Samoan society, in Mead's judgment, "never exerts sufficient repression to call forth a significant rebellion from the individual." Among Samoans, there is "practically no suicide," and suicides of humiliation do "not exist."⁵

The Samoans, given the "pleasant, mild round of their way of life," are "well-adjusted" and "contented," the "adult personality" being "stable enough to resist extraordinary pressures from the outside world and keep its serenity and sureness." A culture such as that of Samoa, claimed Mead, probably assured "the greatest degree of mental health in its members." In 1963, in response to the question "Is there any one society that you have observed in which the people seem considerably happier than those in other societies?" she answered that "a happy society would be one like Samoa."⁶

In these statements from her general purview of Samoan society and character, the central argument on which Mead relied in *Coming of Age in Samoa* is clearly evident. If, as she claimed,

the Samoans were so well-adjusted, with adolescence being the age of maximum ease, and if, as she assumed, the shaping of the character of individuals is absolutely determined by their culture, then the Samoan social environment had also to be free from any significant stress and conflict. It was in these terms then that Mead depicted Samoan culture, so creating her negative instance of a society singularly different from those, like twentieth-century America, in which there was, to use Boas' words, an "adolescent crisis." Mead's argument, reduced to its simplest form, was one in which she purported to demonstrate that the "perfect adjustment" which she claimed to exist in almost all of the adolescents she studied had been shaped by processes of harmonious development in a virtually perfect society. She was thus obliged, by the logic of her central argument, to depict the whole social life of Samoa as being free of happenings that might generate tension and conflict.

The ease that pervades Samoan life, and especially that in sex relations, is made possible, Mead claims, by "the whole system of child rearing." As depicted by Mead, the Samoan extended family, of some fifteen or twenty people, is undifferentiated internally, and characterized by casual relationships and generalized affection. In this situation, "the child is given no sense of belonging to a small intimate biological family," and "the relationship between child and parent is early diffused over many adults." Because they are treated with "easy, unparticularistic affection" by a large group of relatives, children "do not form strong affectional ties with their parents." And so it comes about that "children do not think of an own mother who always protects them," but rather of "a group of adults all of whom have their interests somewhat but not too importantly at heart." This amounts to a claim that in the Samoan family primary bonding between mother and infant does not occur; indeed, Mead leaves us in no doubt that this is her position by asserting that in Samoa "the child owes no emotional allegiance to its father and mother." This being the case, so Mead argues, "the setting for parent fixation vanishes," the relationship between Samoan parents and children being "too casual to foster such attitudes." This means that as children grow up "they are

schooled not by an individual but by an army of relatives into a general conformity upon which the personality of their parents has a very slight effect." "In such a setting," Mead concludes, "there is no room for guilt."⁷

This depiction of a family system without bonding or guilt, Mead then uses to explain the remarkable ease that, so she claims, characterizes life in Samoa, especially during adolescence. If the Samoan girl, she wrote in 1929, ever learned "the meaning of a strong attachment to one person," this would be "a cause of conflict." But this she does not learn. Rather, Samoan children grow up with "easy, friendly warmth and no idea that one human being is unique or that one lover cannot be substituted for another." Thus, "adolescence is not a period when young people rediscover the violent feelings of early childhood, because early childhood provided them with no such feelings to discover."⁸

Closely linked with Mead's depiction of the "easy, friendly warmth" of the diffused relationships that surround a child within the Samoan family is her claim that a child who suffers the domination of a parent or anyone else is readily able to move to another more congenial household. Indeed, from the time they can run about, according to Mead, Samoan children are permitted to, and often do, "show their preference for relatives other than their parents by going to live with them." Under Samoan custom, then, as Mead would have it, Samoan children "choose their own homes," little truants being "welcomed by any relative." This freedom of choice, furthermore, "serves as a powerful deterrent of specific adult tyrannies," so that a child is "often content to remain in one household serene in the reflection that he can always run away if he wishes." This way of dealing with difficulties within the family persists, according to Mead, into adolescence. In *Coming of Age in Samoa*, in discussing girls who deviated in temperament or conduct, she states that "any strong resentment results in the angry one's leaving the household," and that "to escape from a disagreeable situation" an individual "simply slips out of it into the house next door."⁹

Samoan society, as depicted by Mead, is very far from being

harsh or punitive. Instead, it is a society of "diffuse but warm human relationships," in which "neither boys nor girls are hurried or pressed." Within Samoan culture, claims Mead, each child is "given the means to satisfy his desires completely." In the case of a girl, development from childhood to womanhood is "painless," while "the boy who would flee from too much pressure hardly exists in Samoa."¹⁰

Nowhere does Mead make mention of anything resembling severe or grievous punishment of the young. Samoan children, she reports, "are not carefully disciplined until they are five or six"; the avoidances they are required to observe are "enforced by occasional cuffs and a deal of exasperated shouting and ineffectual conversation." In later childhood "violent outbursts of wrath and summary chastisements do occur, but consistent and prolonged disciplinary measures are absent." Occasionally, adults will "vent their full irritation upon the heads of troublesome children" by soundly lashing them with palm leaves or dispersing them with a shower of small stones, but "even these outbursts of anger are nine-tenths gesture," and "no one who throws the stones actually means to hit a child." Such punishment as does exist, if Mead is to be believed, is thus infrequent and slight, with a negligible effect on character formation. In brief, Samoan society, as depicted by Mead, is in essence kindly, permitting in both children and adolescents "a gradual development of the emotional life free from any warping compulsory factor."¹¹

Just as Samoan culture has eliminated strong emotion, so also it has eliminated any interest in competition. Samoan social organization, claims Mead, places "each individual, each household, each village, even (in Western Samoa) each district, in a hierarchy, wherein each is dignified only by its relationship to the whole," each performing tasks that "contribute to the honor and well-being of the whole," so that "competition is completely impossible." Samoa, according to Mead, is thus in its basic composition a cooperative society in which "competition is muted and controlled." Even in everyday life, a growing boy "must never excel his fellows by more than a little," as going faster than one's age mates is "unforgivable." Parents,

says Mead, will blush and hang their heads in shame if one of their children exceeds someone else's child. In this situation those individuals who are less proficient than others in social skills do not experience during either childhood or adolescence any disabling stress. Instead, "the pace is always set by the slowest"; "this is the child to whom everyone points with pride."¹²

In a comparable vein, Mead makes light of the significance in Samoan society of rank, which is "so arranged that there are titles for all those capable of holding them." In Samoa, she states, the sanctity surrounding chiefs is "minimal for the Polynesian area." The *ali'i*, or titular chief, does not "make his own speeches in council." Instead, "his talking chief speaks for him" and "also makes most of his decisions for him."¹³

The traditions of Samoa, according to Mead, are "almost unprecedentedly fluid and variable"; the kava ritual, which is performed whenever chiefs meet in a fono, or formal assembly, is a "dexterous graceful play with social forms," and "so flexible is the social structure, so minutely adapted to manipulation, that it is possible to change the appearance of the *fono* in twenty years." Furthermore, "competition between holders of titles is covert and always expressed as the manipulation of the rank of a title, not as any overt alteration which affects the individual," who is important only in terms of the position he occupies, being of himself nothing.¹⁴

Not only is competition muted and covert within village communities, but also, Mead claims, "competitiveness between villages usually does not reach important heights of inter-village aggression." Thus, "warfare was stylized as part of the inter-relationship between villages that were ceremonial rivals, and occasioned few casualties." Being but a "matter of village spite, or small revenge, in which only one or two individuals would be killed," warfare was "slight and spasmodic." In Manu'a there were "no war gods" and "no war priests." Wars were "fought for no gains other than prestige, nor were there any important rewards for individual warriors." In Manu'a, "bravery in warfare was never a very important matter," and the warrior did not hold any important place in Manu'a society.¹⁵

Samoa society as depicted by Mead is thus markedly unaggressive. The Samoans, she states, "decree that all young people must show the personality trait of unaggressiveness and punish with opprobrium the aggressive child." Again, given their casual attitude toward life, there is among Samoans an "avoidance of conflict," with hostility between individuals being "expressed covertly in the form of gossip and political machinations rather than in open clashes." This setting, Mead argues, does not produce "violent, strikingly marked personalities." The Samoans "never hate enough to want to kill anyone," and are "one of the most amiable, least contentious, and most peaceful peoples in the world." In such a society, if Mead is to be believed, there is obviously little or no possibility, during adolescence or at any other time, of serious stress from acts of aggression. As depicted by Mead, then, "the whole gentle rhythm of life" in Samoa is integral to the benign background that, for Samoan children and adolescents, "makes growing up so easy."¹⁶

By the time Mead began her researches in Samoa toward the end of 1925, the Manu'ans had all been Christians since the 1840s, and for several generations had taken pride in the rigor of their adherence to the strict ordinances of the Protestant London Missionary Society. Yet Mead, in the main text of *Coming of Age in Samoa*, beyond evocative allusions to "the soft bar-
baric singing of Christian hymns" and "brief and graceful evening prayer," makes virtually no reference to the fundamental significance of the Christian church in the day-to-day lives of the Manu'ans. Instead, the place of the Christian religion in Samoa in the mid 1920s is relegated to a single paragraph in an appendix. It was also Mead's view that in aboriginal Samoa religion had "played a very slight role." The premium that was set by society on religion was very low, with all contacts with the supernatural being "accidental, trivial and uninstitutionalized." The gods "were conceived of as having resigned their sacredness to the chiefs"; as being "concerned about their own affairs" and "presiding graciously over the affairs of men" as long as men kept quiet and conformed to the rules.¹⁷

Further, the Samoans she studied in 1925-1926, despite hav-

ing been Christian for almost a hundred years, had only, according to Mead, taken such parts of Western culture "as made their life more comfortable, their culture more flexible" and were "without the doctrine of original sin." Indeed, the missionary influence had failed to give Samoans any "conviction of sin," and, in particular, because of "the great number of native pastors with their peculiar interpretations of Christian teaching," it had been impossible to establish in Samoa "the rigour of Western Protestantism with its inseparable association of sex offences and an individual consciousness of sin." Again, although the Christian church required chastity for church membership, in actual practice, according to Mead, no one became a church member until after marriage, for the authorities made "too slight a bid for young unmarried members to force the adolescent to make any decision." There was thus a "passive acceptance by the religious authorities themselves of premarital irregularities," and in this way the adolescent was relieved from the stress of religious conflict. Any strong religious interest, according to Mead, might have disturbed the nice balance of Samoa society and so had been outlawed. The Manu'ans, then, while having accepted Protestant Christianity, had "gently remoulded some of its sterner tenets" so that it had come to be taken "simply as a pleasant and satisfying social form" in the "elaborate and cherished" traditional pattern of Samoan society.¹⁸

The Samoans, according to Mead, as well as having no conviction of sin, regarded lovemaking as "the pastime *par excellence*," made "a fine art of sex," and had, of all the people she had studied, "the sunniest and easiest attitudes towards sex." Samoa society, she reported, "works very smoothly as it is based on the general assumption that sex is play, permissible in all hetero- and homosexual expression, with any sort of variation as an artistic addition." "Love between the sexes is a light and pleasant dance," and "the expected personality is one to which sex will be a delightful experience expertly engaged in" while not being "sufficiently engrossing to threaten the social order." Thus, "the Samoans condone light love-affairs, but repudiate acts of passionate choice, and have no real place for any-

one who would permanently continue, in spite of social experiences to the contrary, to prefer one woman or one man to a more socially acceptable mate." Romantic love, Mead claims, does not occur in Samoa, and "jealousy, as a widespread social phenomenon, is very rare." Samoan culture, so Mead argues, has eliminated many of the attitudes that have afflicted mankind, and "perhaps jealousy most importantly of all." "Marriages make no violent claims for fidelity" and adultery "is not regarded as very serious." Many adulteries occur "which hardly threaten the continuity of established relationships." A man who seduces his neighbor's wife simply has to settle with his neighbor, as "the society is not interested." The assumption that sex is play provides a cultural atmosphere in which "frigidity and psychic impotence do not occur and in which a satisfactory sex adjustment in marriage can always be established"; the Samoan adult sex adjustment is "one of the smoothest in the world."¹⁹

This exceptionally smooth sex adjustment of adult Samoans is preceded, Mead reports, by a period of free lovenaking and promiscuity before marriage by adolescents. During this time of premarital freedom, sex is regarded as play and as a skill in which one becomes adept; the whole emphasis is on "virtuosity in sex techniques rather than upon personality." This freedom of sexual experimentation, Mead states, is "expected," and the casual love life of a female adolescent begins two or three years after menarche. All of the interest of such a girl is "expended on clandestine sex adventures," and her favors are "distributed among so many youths, all adepts in amorous technique, that she seldom becomes deeply involved." A girl's promiscuity, Mead writes, "seems to ensure her against pregnancy." Illegitimate children are rare and when they do appear are enthusiastically welcomed. In Samoan society then, with its sanctioning of "an easy expression of sexuality" during adolescence, young females "defer marriage through as many years of casual love-making as possible," it being one of their "uniform and satisfying ambitions" to live as girls "with many lovers as long as possible" before marrying and settling down to have many children.²⁰

In the case of male adolescents, a successful lover is defined as one who is able to make a female "sexually contented and who is also himself contented in doing so." Lovemaking is seen as something that must be approached gradually while "the girl's body is prepared to enjoy a lover." In Samoa, then, male sexuality is "never defined as aggressiveness that must be curbed, but simply as a pleasure that might be indulged in, at appropriate times, with appropriate partners." "The idea of forceful rape or of any sexual act to which both participants do not give themselves freely is," according to Mead, "completely foreign to the Samoan mind."²¹

This picture of "the whole social life of Samoa" was constructed by Mead, as we have already seen, with the express purpose of producing a negative instance, by showing that in the mild, gentle, graceful, easy, pleasant, and happy Samoan social environment "adolescence represented no period of crisis or stress." In making this substantive claim, Mead did admit that there were a few girls who deviated in temperament or in conduct, and so lacked the perfect adjustment of the great majority of Samoan girls, but she in no way allowed these deviations to interfere with her general conclusions, arguing that in many cases they "actually had no painful results," and further, that "the causes for absence of conflict in the even tenor of development of the average girl" were actually "corroborated by the turbulent histories of the few cases where these causes did not operate." In almost all of her statements after the publication of *Coming of Age in Samoa* no mention whatever was made of these deviants, and her readers were told, in absolute terms, as in her article "Adolescence in Primitive and Modern Society" of 1930, that "in Samoa there is no conflict because the adolescent girl is faced by neither revelation, restriction, nor choice, and because society expects her to grow up slowly and quietly like a well-behaved flower."²²

Adolescence in Samoa, according to Mead, is thus "peculiarly free of all those characteristics which make it a period dreaded by adults and perilous for young people in more complex—and often also, in more primitive societies." What is the most difficult age in American society becomes in Samoa the

age of maximum ease, "perhaps the pleasantest time the Samoan girl will ever know." With "no religious worries," "no conflicts with their parents," and "no confusion about sex" to vex the souls of Samoan girls, their development is "smooth, untroubled, unstressed," and they grow up "painlessly . . . almost unselfconsciously." And this being so, Mead states, she was left with "just one possible conclusion": that "the woes and difficulties" of American youth could not be "due to adolescence" for, as her researches had shown, in Samoa adolescence brought "no woes." In other words, the crisis and stress of adolescence are determined not by nature but by nurture.²³

On the basis of Mead's writings, Samoa came to be recognized in intellectual circles and in the social sciences as providing conclusive proof of the cultural determinism central to the Boasian paradigm. This paradigm, as we have seen, had been launched in 1917 in the theoretical formulations of Kroeber and Lowie; what was sorely needed, thereafter, was an empirical demonstration of the validity of these purely theoretical formulations. Just over a decade later, this demonstration, so it seemed to the Boasians, had been decisively given by the publication of the "painstaking investigation" conducted in Samoa by Margaret Mead. So enthusiastically was Mead's vision of Samoa accepted that her conclusions, as they were elaborated by herself and others, gave rise to what has become the most widely promulgated myth of twentieth-century anthropology.

II

Aggressive Behavior and Warfare

IN HER DEPICTION of the ease and casualness of their society, Mead, as we have seen, gave special emphasis to the "unaggressiveness" of the Samoans, describing them as "one of the most amiable, least contentious, and most peaceful peoples in the world." They were, she reiterated in 1950, a "peaceful and constructive people" among whom warfare had been "stylized as part of the interrelationship between villages that were ceremonial rivals and occasioned few casualties." These assertions, on which Mead so relied in her general theorizing about Samoa, are markedly at variance with the facts of Samoan history.¹

The reputation of the Samoans as an unusually bellicose people began, for Europeans, in 1787, with the fierce affray in which twelve members of the ill-fated La Pérouse Expedition and some thirty Tutuilans lost their lives. La Pérouse observed

of the Samoans, "the least dispute between them is followed by blows from clubs, sticks or paddles; and often, no doubt, costs the combatants their lives. Almost all of them are covered with scars, which must have been the consequences of these private quarrels." In 1824 Otto von Kotzebue, who had had to force the Tutuilans from the sides of his ship with long poles when they tried to storm it, considered them to be "perhaps the most ferocious people to be met with in the South Seas." It was not, however, until the early 1830s that the bellicosity of the Samoans became firmly established through the observations and inquiries of the pioneer missionary and explorer John Williams.²

When Williams reached Savai'i from Tonga in 1830, a "devastating war" occasioned by the assassination of the chief Tafafai was raging in the district of A'ana at the western end of the island of Upolu. Williams could clearly see the villages of A'ana enveloped in flames and smoke. When the paramount chief, Malietoa Vai-inu-po, returned from the fighting to greet Williams and his fellow missionary Charles Barff, he gave them to understand that war was "his great delight" and said that the thing he most wanted, as he would be the laughing stock of his brother chiefs if he were not given it, was a musket. This war between the inhabitants of A'ana and the more numerous forces of Manono and its allies lasted for eight months, with frequent set battles involving hundreds of warriors. Williams recounts that during the course of this war, in which well over a thousand people lost their lives, canoes would arrive in Savai'i with the remains of those who had fallen, and that "the dismal howlings and lamentations of the relatives, their frantic behavior, the frightful lacerations they inflicted upon themselves with shells and shark's teeth, together with the horrid appearance of the victims," kept everyone in "a state of intense excitement and distress." When A'ana finally surrendered, more than four hundred of its inhabitants, including many women and children, who had been sheltering in forts, were "thrown indiscriminately into large fires," while others, according to Williams, were cut open and had their hearts torn out. At the end of this war those who had been defeated were, in accordance with Samoan custom, driven from their lands, and their houses and plantations

were laid waste, so that when Thomas Heath toured A'ana some five years later he could "scarcely see a hut in a distance of ten miles, where formerly had dwelt perhaps 5,000 or 6,000 people."³

Whether any of the numerous wars of the earlier history of Samoa, many of which also involved entire districts, were as devastating as the A'ana war of 1830-1831, we cannot be sure; there is, however, substantial evidence that wars in pagan Samoa were "exceedingly frequent." Williams records that although ignorant of the art of writing the chiefs of Manono kept, in a sacred house on the nearby island of Apolima (which they used as a fortress), a basket in which each war in which they had fought had been marked by the depositing of a stone, the size of each stone indicating the magnitude of the war it commemorated. When these stones were counted in 1832, they numbered 197, and when Stair later took possession of this basket he found that some of the stones were much larger than others.⁴

Williams' landfall on 17 October 1832, on his second voyage to Samoa, was Ta'u in Manu'a. He found that about four months earlier the settlement of Ta'u, when attempting to invade and conquer the nearby island of Olosega with a fleet of about one hundred canoes (in retaliation for a previous killing in a long-standing feud), had suffered a severe defeat. Thirty-five of their number had been slain, a loss that more than decimated the able-bodied adult male population of the settlement of Ta'u. Comparable death rates occurred, as I shall presently substantiate, in a war that took place between Ta'u and Olosega some fifty years later.⁵

Such intervillage conflict, albeit in a less severe form, continued into the twentieth century. Thus, some four years after Mead's research in Manu'a there was, in direct continuation of their ancient feud, a major affray between Ta'u and Olosega. Again, as Holmes noted, following his research in Manu'a and Tutuila in 1954, "serious conflicts between villages" often occurred and it was "not unusual for the government anthropologist in Tutuila to be summoned in the middle of the night to try to settle differences between two outlying villages before vio-

lence occurs." In Western Samoa in 1964, when its inhabitants numbered approximately 123,000, there were forty-nine affrays sufficiently serious to require intervention by the police, yielding the high rate of forty affrays per annum per 100,000 of population.⁶

Such affrays, which may involve from ten to fifty or more individuals of both sexes and all ages from rival local polities or from families of the same village, are in effect small-scale undeclared wars, in which fists, sticks, and stones tend to be used rather than more dangerous weapons. Affrays have long been characteristic of Samoan society; there are numerous reports of them in mission and other records. In 1836, for example, on Savai'i, Platt and Wilson observed a "regular fight" in which the members of two neighboring polities were "belaboring one another's heads with sticks and stones," a conflict occasioned by the people of one polity having "killed and baked a hog belonging to another."⁷

Affrays also commonly occur between rivalrous extended families of the same village, and may continue intermittently over several days until those involved are either apprehended and fined by the local fono or restrained by the police. In 1961, for example, such an affray occurred between two families, the Sa Oloaga and the Sa Manu'o, in Lufilufi on the north coast of Upolu. It began when Lusua and Peone, the 10- and 11-year old daughters of Suapusi, the chief of the Sa Oloaga, encountered Pota'e and Fa'ani, two adolescent female members of their long-standing rivals, the Sa Manu'o. Seeing Pota'e and Fa'ani, Peone remarked, for all to hear, "How superior are those excrement eaters' mouths!" This at once led to a fight in which Lusua and Peone, who were conveniently armed with sticks, managed to drive off their older rivals. The next day Maria, an older sister of Peone and Lusua, as she was going to church, came upon Pota'e and Fa'ani in the roadway. As she passed them, Pota'e coughed loudly. "Who are you coughing at?" said Maria. "At no one other than you!" retorted Pota'e. In the ensuing fight, which involved three girls from each family, Pota'e was hammered on the head with a stone so that she had to be taken to the hospital. At this Fetuana'i, the chief of the Manu'o family, sought out

the wife of his rival chief, Suapusi. After further wounding insults, there was another serious affray between five members of each family, during which females on both sides bared their buttocks at one another. That night Opopo, of the Sa Manu'o, who had been drinking, was heard shouting (in English) outside the house of Oloaga Suapusi: "Oloaga! Come and have a war!" This "war" took place the following day with a fierce stone-throwing affray in which several individuals were badly injured. It was finally stopped by a number of staff-wielding talking chiefs. Nine members of the Sa Oloaga and ten members of the Sa Manu'o were later convicted of assault and provoking a breach of the peace. Lusua, the 10-year-old who had started it all, was fined £10.⁸

This case well illustrates various facets of the rivalrous aggression that is so characteristic of Samoan society: for example, the concern of rivals about their relative rank, the way in which fights are willfully provoked by verbal insults or other displays, the quickness with which a rival takes offense, the readiness of others of the same group to be drawn into the fighting; the vigor with which talking chiefs act to quell an affray; and finally, the fact that adolescent girls are prone to rivalrous aggression, just as are adolescent boys. In 1963, for example, also in Lufilufi, an 18-year-old girl, Fa'atupu, having become incensed with Pese, a 32-year-old woman of another 'aiga, for having remarked that Fa'atupu had "sucked up" to the village pastor, rushed with her brothers into the house of Pese and her mother and struck each of them repeatedly on the head with a stone while her brothers held their arms. During the attack on the mother, moreover, Fa'atupu's father, who was also present, shouted, "Bash her until her brains burst forth!" Both Pese and her mother were admitted to the hospital with suspected concussion. Fa'atupu and her two brothers were convicted of having caused "actual bodily harm" and were heavily fined.⁹

Affrays involving males tend to result in much more serious injuries. In Safotu on the north coast of Savai'i in October 1961, a 25-year-old Safotu man fought with and knocked unconscious a male rival from the nearby village of Avao. He was pursued by

ten young men of Avao, hit twice on the head with a Samoan cricket bat, and then stoned to death. Five of his assailants were adolescents. All ten assailants were convicted of manslaughter and given sentences ranging from three to seven years.¹⁰

Affrays also occur in American Samoa. On 30 October 1967, for example, in the village of Fagasa on the north coast of the island of Tutuila, after a rock throwing fight between two families who had long been locked in a feud over a plot of land, five people were taken to the hospital, and the fono of Fagasa threatened to exile from the polity one of the families concerned.¹¹

With affrays such as these having an annual incidence (in Western Samoa) of 40 per 100,000 of population, and with the annual incidence of assault with bodily injury (see p. 164) being 105.1 per 100,000 of population, no credence can be given to Mead's assertion of 1950 that in Samoa "hostility between individuals" is expressed "covertly in the form of gossip and political machinations rather than in open clashes," nor is there any empirical ground for accepting her assertion that Samoans "never hate enough to want to kill anybody."¹²

The Samoan term for the cherishing of anger is *ita fa'amoe-moe*, literally "anger that has been slept upon," and such anger readily turns into hatred. And when hatred has taken root, murderous attacks do sometimes occur. In 1963, for example, Sio, a 20-year-old youth of Lotofaga on the south coast of Upolu, became so suffused with hatred for Aupito, a 39-year-old chief of a collateral branch of Sio's family, "because of his ungrateful and wrongful doings" over the possession of a title that after midnight he crept into Aupito's house and slashed at his head with a long-bladed bush knife. Had not Aupito managed to avoid this blow he would certainly have been killed, for it cut deeply into the pillow and mattress on which he had been lying. Sio was convicted of attempted murder and sentenced to ten years' imprisonment.¹³

In another case of the many I might instance, Salu, a 23-year-old man of Vailoa village in Aleipata at the eastern end of Upolu, became incensed following the hearing of a dispute over his family's title at the Land and Titles Court on 15 December

1964, at which Saumalu Tui, a 65-year-old ali'i had given evidence that Salu judged to be in error. Salu came bitterly to hate this older member of his 'aiga, who was a first cousin of his deceased father. On New Year's Eve, 1964, in the Methodist Church at Vailoa, a service was held in which Saumalu Tui preached the sermon, while his nephew Salu played the organ. Toward the end of his sermon, Saumalu Tui exhorted the assembled villagers to "give up both lying and contending against chiefly authority in the hope that in the New Year they could achieve a new village." When Salu heard these words, and, in particular, Saumalu Tui's adjuration to give up lying, he was so overcome with hatred (as he later confessed to the police) that he at once left the church. Some time later, when Saumalu Tui was sitting outside his home scraping taro, Salu shot him in the head. When Saumalu Tui recovered consciousness in the hospital and was told who had been his assailant, he was "astounded," for, as he told the police, he had always looked upon his organ-playing nephew as "very good and quiet." Salu was convicted of having caused grievous bodily harm and sentenced to three years in prison.¹⁴

That their society is conducive to aggressive behavior is well recognized by the Samoans themselves. In the words of Ane-sone, the pastor of Mulinu'u, at a public reconciliation on 9 November 1966 between two litigating villages from the south coast of Upolu: "Conflict comes easily in this country of Samoa; a village that lives in peace is rarely found."¹⁵

Again, Sir Angus Sharp, a former New Zealand Commissioner of Police, on retiring in mid 1978 after seventeen months as Commissioner of Police in Western Samoa, while praising the Samoans as a people with "a well deserved reputation for courtesy, hospitality and generosity," went on to observe that despite these virtues, the amount of violence among Samoans was "frightening." In 1977, he noted, 10 murders had been committed in Western Samoa, with a population of only 150,000. This is a rate of 6.66 per 100,000 of population. In American Samoa, in 1977, when the population was about 31,000, there were 8 criminal homicides, which equals a rate of about 25 per 100,000.¹⁶

In *Studies in Homicide*, M. E. Wolfgang presents a table of homicide rates of sixty-one countries that reported to the United Nations, ranging, in 1960, from Colombia, with 34.0 per 100,000, to Ireland with 0.2; the rate for the United States was 4.5. Western Samoa's homicide rate in 1977 was more than three times higher than that of Singapore, the median country in Wolfgang's list, while the rate in American Samoa was more than thirteen times higher.¹⁷

In cases of serious assault, that is of assault resulting in some kind of bodily injury, the comparisons are even more significant, for it is violence of this kind that has long been especially characteristic of Samoan society. There are, I am aware, numerous pitfalls in the path of those who would compare the crime rates of different countries. In Samoa, for example, a very high percentage of delicts, including assault, are dealt with directly by the chiefs of a local polity in an especially summoned *fono*, and so are not communicated to the police. This means that the percentage of cases of assault actually reported to the police in Samoa is likely to be considerably smaller than in some other countries. Again, there may be differences from one country to another in the definition of serious assault. All I am interested in, however, is a general and approximate indication of the comparative level of violence in Samoan society. If then we concentrate on cases of assault "causing bodily injury" that were reported to the police in Western Samoa during the three years 1964-1966, the rate per 100,000 of population was 105.1 per annum. This compares with rates of 11.1 for New Zealand (for the male population aged 16 and over during the years 1957-1964), of 17.7 for Australia (1964-1966) and of 62.9 for the United States (cases of aggravated assault in 1965). On these figures the Western Samoan rate of cases of serious assault was, in the mid 1960s, about 67 percent higher than the U.S. rate, 494 percent higher than the Australian rate, and 847 percent higher than the New Zealand rate.¹⁸

If we next turn to cases of common assault known to the police in Western Samoa during the years 1964-1966, the rate per 100,000 of population was 773.35 per annum. The comparable U.S. rate (arrests during 1965) was 154.8, which means that the

Western Samoan rate for common assault in the mid 1960s was about five times higher than that of the United States.

These Samoan rates of homicide and assault, even if the above comparisons be only very approximate, when taken together with the cases I have presented, do demonstrate clearly that the people of Samoa are greatly given to interpersonal aggression, and are thus very far from being, as Mead claimed, one of the "least contentious and most peaceful peoples in the world."

In constructing her picture of the "general casualness" of Samoan culture, Mead also made light of the significance of warfare in Samoan history. For example, in her monograph of 1930 on the social organization of Manu'a, she stated that war, in the Manu'an islands, was "slight and spasmodic." Indeed, she attributed what she supposed to be the rudimentary development of religion in Manu'a to "the small population and lack of war." It was "plausible," she wrote, to suggest that "the numerous tales of conflict in myths" might "all have been inspired by the same few intervillage clashes." War in Samoa then, as depicted by Mead (in 1928), was merely "a matter of village spite, or small revenge, in which only one or two individuals would be killed," or (as she stated in 1937) "a part of the ceremonial rivalry between villages" being "fought for no gains other than prestige," in which case, once again, "casualties were low." In Manu'a, according to Mead, there were "no war gods," "bravery in warfare was never a very important matter," and the warrior did not hold "any important place in the society."¹⁹

Mead's depiction of Samoan warfare is deeply at variance with the judgments of both the Samoans and the Europeans who witnessed Samoan warfare, in both the eastern and western islands of the archipelago, during the nineteenth century. Moa, an ali'i of Olosega, one of the islands of Manu'a, began his statement to the American Samoan Commission in 1930 with the observation that the Samoan people had been "very fond of war," and Tuitele, of Tutuila, told the Commission that in former centuries "district warred with district" and "island warred with island." Again, the ali'i Tuatagaloa, of the Falealili District of the island of Upolu, in a speech to the Western Samoan

Royal Commission in 1927, said that Samoans had long been "accustomed to wars and bloodshed."²⁰

In the words of Murray, whose experience of Samoa, including Manu'a, extended over several decades from 1836 onward, "domestic and other feuds often disturbed the peace of the community, and wars, on greater or smaller scale, were of frequent occurrence and sometimes were attended with deeds of revolting cruelty." Stair, who was in western Samoa from 1838 to 1845, reports that wars amongst the Samoans were "frequent and bloody," and that the islands were seldom free from "actual warfare or local quarrels." When Wilkes arrived in Manu'a in October 1839, where, as Williams records, there had been a major conflict in 1832, he found the people again on the verge of war. Of the Samoan archipelago at large Wilkes notes that "scarcely a month passed without quarrels being avenged . . . with blows." He also records that in the war of 1830-1831 the inhabitants of A'ana in Upolu, had been "almost exterminated." King, in September 1864, following the outbreak of hostilities between Falealupo and a number of other villages at the western end of Savai'i, observed that war was "the one absorbing thought of all"; and Whitnee, who was (like King) in Samoa from 1863 to 1872, described the Samoans as being "in war . . . furious," and as exhibiting, when the war spirit was upon them, characteristics "totally different from anything one would think them capable of when seen in time of peace," being ready to "butcher and mutilate one another in the most barbarous manner." These statements are confirmed by Krämer, who has described the "violent passions" of the otherwise amiable Samoans, which in time of war were "set recklessly free."²¹

Krämer records that in Samoan warfare it was usual for male captives to be killed, after which everything that had fallen into the hands of the victors was carried away, while the settlements of the defeated were plundered and their plantations destroyed in the general devastation. That such devastation occurred is fully substantiated by Powell's eyewitness account of the war that broke out in Tutuila in 1859, following the murder of a young man of the family of Mauga, the high chief of Pago Pago. Because Le'iato, a rival ali'i, gave refuge to the kin-

dred of those responsible for this murder, "war mania" was soon rampant among the forces led by Mauga, and when Le'iato and his allies abandoned their villages and fled for safety to an offshore island, all of their houses were burnt, their plantations destroyed, their coconut and breadfruit trees cut down, and the graves of their dead desecrated. Such desecration commonly involved the taking of skulls, and, as Hardie recorded in 1844, it was a widespread practice in ancient Samoa, when invasion was apprehended for the skulls of departed relatives to be disinterred "to secure them from the insults of the invaders."²²

The slain on the battlefield were also, in Frazer's words, "treated with great indignity," their heads being hacked off and carried in triumph to be paraded before the high chiefs of the victors. Pritchard, who witnessed Samoan warfare during the decade 1848-1858, has given an account of the excitement and pride of the successful warrior as he capered before his approving chiefs with the head he had acquired, shouting in triumph "I've taken a man!" "To a young Samoan," writes Pritchard, "this is the realization of his highest ambition, to be thus publicly thanked by the chiefs for slaying an enemy in mortal combat" and then to become known, far and wide, as a *toa*, or "brave."²³

Such ferocious warfare produced, as Krämer notes, a longing for vengeance and retribution and frequently led to atrocities and other forms of revengeful behavior. In 1886 Josia, a Samoan pastor, recorded that in a war at Lepā, on the south coast of Upolu, numbers of children were killed, some being hung in trees to have spears thrown at them, while others were cut in half. Again, Williams records that following the war of 1832 between Ta'u and Olosega, a young woman obtained the head of the man who had killed her father. This head she burnt gradually upon a fire and, having beaten it to a powder, "cooked food on it which she ate with great delight." In some instances, as Hunkin reported from Manu'a in 1845, cannibalism was practiced "in the case of prisoners taken in war." Extremes of retaliatory aggression were also practiced following the assassination of the tyrannical Tamafaiga in 1830 by the people of A'ana, and, in particular, for the mutilation of his body. As Williams

records, after Tamafaiga's head had been severed from his body, his legs were hacked off for his "gadding about to other people's settlements," his hands for his "seizing of other people's property," his "parts of generation" for his having had "connection with other men's wives," and his tongue for his "intolerable insolence." Because of these extreme indignities the war of 1830-1831 was fought, as Williams reports, with "frightful severity." Thus, as already noted, some hundreds of women and children were cast into huge fires, and according to Heath several human victims, mostly boys were "baked and eaten like hogs."²⁴

The casualties in the Samoan wars for which we have historical information, as I have already indicated, were very far from being trivial. When the people of A'ana reoccupied their devastated lands in 1836, some 3000 returned to a district where, according to Heath, perhaps 5000 or 6000 people had formerly lived. From this and other evidence it would seem likely that from 1000 to 1500 people, or up to a quarter of the population of A'ana, lost their lives in the war of 1830-1831, and the dead of Manono and her allies probably ran into some hundreds. While this is certainly the most devastating war of which we have reliable knowledge, there is also evidence of substantial loss of life in other conflicts. For example, when hostilities broke out anew between Manono and A'ana and their allies in June 1848, there was further large-scale destruction of the houses and plantations of A'ana; as Hardie reported in August 1848, 130 were killed in the first two months of fighting.²⁵

There is well-substantiated evidence that warfare in Manu'a, where the total population in the mid nineteenth century was little more than 1400, was comparably destructive. Indeed, during the nineteenth century the people of Manu'a had the reputation of being exceptionally bellicose. For example, Murray, from his own observations as well as those of Matthew Hunkin, who was stationed in Manu'a for six years from 1842 onward, has noted that it was "the universal testimony of all the islands," as of the Manu'ans themselves, that they greatly exceeded the Samoans of the western islands in "barbarity and ferocity." Similarly, Young has noted that historically the

Manu'ans have had the reputation of "being the fiercest of warriors." As already recounted, the war of 1832 in Manu'a resulted, if Williams' testimony be accepted, in the deaths of approximately 16 percent of the adult male population of the settlement of Ta'u, a very severe rate of loss. Heavy losses also occurred with the resumption of warfare between Ta'u and Olosega during the years 1866-1871, a period for which Powell's reports provide detailed and reliable information. Of either this war or that of 1832, Mead makes no mention whatsoever.²⁶

The war of 1866-1871 was precipitated when Lalolagi, a young chief of Olosega, usurped the age-old prerogative of the Tui Manu'a of having a conch-shell trumpet blown by a talking chief when he went on a ceremonial journey. In retaliation for this insult to their paramount chief, the polity of Ta'u in 1866 launched an attack on the island of Olosega, in which seven warriors of Olosega and three of Ta'u were killed. After another affray in August 1867, in which six from Ta'u lost their lives, the forces of Ta'u, in September 1867, with a loss of nine of their own number, killed fifteen of their enemies, after which the entire population of Olosega fled to Tutuila, leaving their lands to be devastated by Ta'u. Two years later, in 1869, after their return to their island, a newly elected Tui Olosega and the members of his party were attacked and killed during a ceremonial visit to Ta'u, and the polity of Fitiuta, the ancient rival of Ta'u, gave refuge to the followers of this murdered chief. Ta'u attacked Fitiuta in January 1871, and eight men from Ta'u lost their lives, two of them having their heads taken. By the time Powell finally succeeded in bringing a halt to these protracted hostilities in May 1871, he had recorded 55 male deaths over a period of six years. In 1862, a few years before this war began, the total population of Manu'a consisted of 688 females and 780 males. From data recorded by Powell, it is known that approximately 40 percent of these 780 males were boys, leaving a total of about 470 men. On these figures, the 55 men killed in warfare between 1866 and 1871 represents a loss of 11.7 percent of the adult male population of Manu'a, which is, once again, a severe rate of loss. Indeed, from the available data on Samoan warfare during the nineteenth century there is good reason to accept

Brown's view that "the wars of the Samoans tended for a long time to check the natural increase of population." These same data, furthermore, make it plainly evident that warfare in Samoa, far from being characterized, as Mead asserted, by low casualties, was, in fact, decidedly destructive of human life.²⁷

Moreover, instead of having been, as Mead supposed, a form of stylized "ceremonial rivalry," warfare in Samoa was in reality a violent and ruthless struggle for political dominance. As Ella has noted, each of the political spheres of Samoa was "divided into two parties" the *mālō*, or "conquerors," and the *to'fiato*, or "conquered and enslaved." This divisiveness gave rise to an ending struggle for supremacy, with first one alliance of local polities and then another gaining dominance. A war, Erskine noted in 1853, was not considered at an end until the conquered party made "with many degrading ceremonies and promises, full submission to the victors," and this outcome could only be achieved when one side had inflicted a crippling defeat on the other. Samoan warfare was thus a violent struggle between rival polities for outright dominance, and it is this fact which accounts for the ferocity and tenacity with which wars were fought, as also for the numerous casualties and not infrequent atrocities. In September 1853, for example, more than five years after the struggle between Manono and A'ana and their allies had again erupted into open conflict in June 1848, Turner reported that Manono and Savai'i were "as determined as ever on having the upper hand" while A'ana and her ally Atua, rather than submit to their traditional rivals, were ready to "die first," with each side being "bent on the other's ruin." Similarly, in Manu'a, as Williams observed in 1832, there was a *mālō* that held supremacy in consequence of being the strongest. In Manu'a this supremacy rested with the paramount chief of the local polity of Ta'u, the Tui Manu'a, and, as already recounted, when the people of Olosega challenged this supremacy in 1866 by the usurping of one of the Tui Manu'a's traditional prerogatives, they were defeated and forced to surrender their lands, for a time, to the *mālō* of Ta'u. In Samoa then, as the history of their warfare demonstrates, the rank system was derived from, and continuously depended upon, the attainment of political

dominance by force of arms. Further, the high levels of aggression noted earlier in this chapter, which still obtain in Samoa, stem predominantly, today as in the past, from the numerous situations of contentious rivalry generated by dominance and rank.²⁸

In Samoan society, in which those who conquered were of the highest rank, the prowess of the warrior (contrary to Mead's assertion) was valued above all else, with bravery in warfare being esteemed as the most important of all manly attributes. In Samoan values, as the novelist Albert Wendt has noted, the coward was execrated beyond all others. Krämer, following Pratt, lists no fewer than twelve terms in the Samoan language, all of them derogatory, referring to cowards. It is to Mead's aspersions about the Samoans' lack of appreciation of bravery in warfare, and her related claims as to the "scant premium . . . upon fortitude and endurance," that Samoan men take the keenest exception. For example, in Siufaga in 1967, when I repeated Mead's statement that the warrior did not hold any important place in Manu'a society, the immediate and irate response of one of the orators of the high chief Lefti was, "How could a warrior who has demonstrated his prowess on behalf of his polity possibly lack importance!"²⁹

As Williams noted in 1832, warriors were in fact "held in great estimation by the chiefs," who supplied them with their every need and forbade them to engage in ordinary work. Throughout Samoa, furthermore, the holders of the highest chiefly titles were all descendants of illustrious warriors. In the eastern islands, as noted in Chapter 9, Ali'a Tama was the warrior from whom the paramount rank of Ta'u and the Tui Manu'a stemmed, while in the western islands the august title of Malietoa (which is at present held by Malietoa Tanumafili II, the Head of State of Western Samoa) was acquired in the thirteenth century when the brothers Tuna and Fata, as they drove the last of the Tongan invaders from Samoan shores, were hailed by the departing Tui Tonga Talakaifake with the words, "Brave warriors! Well fought! I will not again venture to Samoa in a war canoe!" The memory of this occasion still excites the pride of Samoans, as does Marathon that of the Greeks.³⁰

R. S. Moore and J. R. Farrington, who accompanied the congressional commission to American Samoa in 1931, were shown a 150-year-old war club with which, they say, a "hero had slain many enemies and won a place in village history similar to that of George Washington in American history." When such a warrior fell in battle his obsequies were marked, as Pratt notes, by a fire that was kept burning for seven days, and his war club, as Pritchard mentions, was often laid on his grave as a "mute record of his valor and prowess." Further, in most Samoan polities there were traditionally vanguards, the warriors of which, as Turner notes, boasted of their right to lead any attack and, like Spartans, of the "glory of dying in battle."³¹

In Samoan society, then, in the nineteenth and earlier centuries, the warrior held a place of high importance. Even today, decades after the suppression of open warfare by European governments, young Samoan men can be heard, especially when intoxicated, giving voice to the high-pitched challenge of former times and volubly claiming the vaunted status of a warrior of some local polity.

Among such a warlike people there were, not surprisingly, numerous war gods. Turner in his classic account of the religion of pagan Samoa discusses about seventy superior gods (as he calls them), more than half of whom were war gods, with Le Fanoga, who was incarnate in the owl, being one of the most important of them in both the eastern and western islands.³² Here, once again, Mead's account is both mistaken and confused. For example, having asserted in *Social Organization of Manu'a* that there were "no war gods" in Manu'a, she goes on to record that the owl, whose cry "meant war," was "a war spirit" on Ofu, one of the islands of Manu'a. Further, Le Fanoga, the "war god" of whom she makes mention, had, as Powell (whom she cites) makes clear, originated in Manu'a. He was a son of Tagaloa, and incarnate in the owl, which was, as Mead herself records, the incarnation of a god "formerly worshipped" in Ta'u.³³ Hardie, writing in the late 1830s, identified the war god Le Fanoga as an attendant upon the Tui Manu'a, and recorded the following prayer offered to Le Fanoga "in time of war":

O Fanoga, compassionate us, receive our offerings and be propitious to us and make us prosperous; save us from injury and death. When our enemies pursue us make our backs invisible to them, and let it be bright and clear before us. May no yam holes or other pits or snares be in our way, and make us strong and quick of foot that we may escape unhurt. When we pursue our enemies, let their backs be visible to us but we invisible to them; let yam holes, and other pits and snares and obstacles be in the way that we may overtake and kill them and obtain the victory and ruling power!³⁴

That the Manu'ans did indeed have war gods, upon whom they called for strength and assistance, is made clear not only by Powell and Hardie but also by Williams, who in Ta'u in October 1832 recorded, in Samoan, a prayer that he translates: "O Tagaloa! Make your people valiant! Conquer and drive away those who make war on us!" In Manu'a, as in the rest of Samoa during the nineteenth and earlier centuries, far from being "slight and spasmodic" as Mead would have it, warfare was a common occurrence and often highly destructive of human life and property.³⁵

13

Punishment

ALTHOUGH IN *SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF MANU'A* Mead does mention that in ancient Samoa "violent breaches of the pattern" were "vindictively punished" (giving the example of someone who stole being made to sit in the sun and toss a poisonous fish in his hands), she declares that this punishment was only "vaguely glimpsed as a deterrent," and elsewhere records that by the 1920s extreme measures of this kind had been outlawed. Samoan society as depicted by Mead was neither out-nor punitive. Rather, so she asserted, the Samoans inhabit a social order that "is kind to all and does not make sufficient demands upon any." These assertions are inaccurate and misleading. In recounting the myth of Tagaloa's punishing of the disobedient Sa and Manu by turning them into sea urchins, to which I have referred in Chapter 12, Fraser commented that if

any special truth was burnt into the minds of pagan Samoans by such tales of Tagaloa's powers it was that "any transgressions of the commands of their gods or their chiefs" were "sure to be visited with punishment." As this indicates, the Samoans give particular emphasis, through the imposition of various kinds of punishment, to the active maintenance of obedience to those in chiefly authority.¹

The Samoan term for obedience, *usiisita'i*, refers specifically to the action of listening to an instruction and then un-questioningly carrying it out. In Samoa such obedience, to chiefly instructions in particular, is greatly lauded, especially in untitled men, members of the *'aumaga*, whose principal obligation is to serve the chiefs of their local polity. Thus, when the men of an *'aumaga* are summoned before their chiefs it is common for a senior talking chief to remind them of "the supreme importance of obedience," as also of the fact that their obedience should be marked by a proper submissiveness. In April 1966, for example, in my hearing a senior talking chief of Sa'anapu told the assembled members of the *'aumaga* that "in an untitled man, a lowly heart is praiseworthy," and in March 1967 another high-ranking talking chief admonished the Sa'anapu *'aumaga*: "You must obey in everything! Obey completely! Even though your chief be in error."

In other words, in Samoan society untitled men are called upon to be the submissive and wholly obedient agents of their chiefs. This customary requirement of absolute obedience is sometimes advanced as a defense in Samoan courts. For example, in the Supreme Court of Western Samoa in April 1941, Miss O. F. Nelson pleaded on behalf of seven untitled men who had assaulted a man of their village that they were merely, as Samoan custom required, "blindly obeying" the edicts of their chiefs. In this case, some twenty chiefs of a village on the north coast of Upolu had taken it upon themselves to impose upon a fellow chief who had defied a ruling of their fono the most demeaning of all Samoan punishments, that of *saisai*, which involves tying up an offender as though he were a pig about to be baked in an earth oven, and then inflicting upon him various other indignities.²

A comparable case also occurred in April 1941 in another village on the north coast of Upolu. The chiefs had become incensed because a man of their village (I shall call him Tala) had given evidence against them during a hearing in the Land and Titles Court in September 1940. In October 1940 these chiefs convened a fono to decide what punishment they would mete out to Tala. Their decision, so the court was told, was to tie him up "like a pig, and bring human excrement and put it in his mouth, and make an oven to symbolize the cooking of man." The forced ingestion of excrement, which is eaten by pigs, and the treating of a man as though he were, like a pig, fit only to be eaten, are ultimate forms of subjugation. This extreme form of punishment, as Stuebel recorded in a text collected in the late nineteenth century, was once meted out to anyone who cast aspersions on the genealogy of a chief. As Stuebel's informants remarked of such an offender: "Even his children and sisters could be slain, or they might be publicly shamed by being led to the oven or by having human excrement thrust into their mouths, while the malefactor himself would certainly be killed."³

Tala fled and was not apprehended until 19 April 1941. He was struck on the head with a heavy husking stick, then suspended naked, trussed like a pig, from a thick rough pole about ten feet long, and in his abject state displayed for all to see. As the court was told by the Crown Prosecutor, "this is the greatest insult, according to Samoan custom, that can be inflicted on anyone." All those directly responsible were given prison sentences varying from two to three months.⁴

This punishment of *saisai*, as the reports of Turner, Brown, and others show, is very much a part of the traditional culture of Samoa, and, although Mead makes no mention of *saisai* in her discussion of "the offenders and the offended" in *Social Organization of Manu'a*, it was certainly being practiced during the 1920s when she was in Samoa. For example, F. H. Flaherty has reported that in Savai'i in 1924 culprits were brought before a chief "swinging between bamboo poles, trussed like pigs"; she adds that in Samoa "no more terrible disgrace" can befall a man. Further, this dire punishment is still occasionally inflicted;

a prosecution for saisai was heard in the Supreme Court of Western Samoa as recently as January 1981.⁵

As recorded in an official report of 1950 in Western Samoa, the trial and punishment of those guilty of offences against custom has "always been among the major functions" of the titular and talking chiefs of a local polity. And as mentioned in *Institutions and Customs of the Samoans* (a compilation by the Education Department of Western Samoa), those guilty of "repeated impudence or disobedience" toward the fono of their community are the most heavily punished. Thus in 1862 Ta'unga, a Rarotongan pastor stationed in Manu'a, wrote that the chiefs of Ta'u would not "countenance any wrong-doing" and when one of their laws was broken would seek very carefully to find a punishment that was "appropriate" to the offense.⁶

When a sufficiently serious offense does occur, a juridical assembly, or *fono manu*, is immediately summoned, a special kava ceremony held, and, after detailed consideration, a specific punishment decided upon by the assembled titular and talking chiefs. A distinction is made, as Stair notes, between punishments imposed on an entire family and those inflicted on an individual. An especially severe form of traditional punishment by a village fono was the banishment of an entire family, which was for a time legalized under the laws proclaimed by Malietoa Laupepa in 1892, before being prohibited in Western Samoa by Governor Solf in 1901. When a fono decided on the banishment of a family it was usual, as Stair has described, for its chiefs to walk to the house of the offending family, there to seat themselves on the ground while the highest-ranking talking chief formally announced their decision. This done, others of the judicial party would appropriate the family's pigs and other property, cut down or ring-bark their breadfruit trees, and, after their enforced departure, set fire to their houses. The 1927 Report of the Royal Commission on Western Samoa lists a number of such banishments in the late nineteenth century, including one in which an entire village was permanently "ordered away." On other occasions an individual who had offended the fono was banished, and from time to time in twentieth-century

Samoa a chief is formally expelled from a fono. In 1946, for example, a titular chief was expelled for acting in defiance of the ruling of the fono of Sa'anapu that village land should not be leased to outsiders for the purpose of erecting a trading store, and in 1966 another ali'i was similarly expelled for disobeying the instruction to accompany his fono in an ifoga to the village of Sataoa after unfitted males of his family had killed and eaten one of the cattle of Sataoa.⁷

In former times there were many other forms of severe personal punishment, particularly for acts of disobedience or disrespect to chiefs. Krämer mentions the beating of an offender until his head bled and his bones cracked. Wilkes and Turner record the cutting off of ears and noses, and Stair describes a punishment that involved compelling an offender "to inflict severe wounds and bruises upon himself, by beating his head and chest with a large stone, until the blood flowed freely," this being enforced, if necessary, by "the prompt and unsparing use of a war club." Yet another painful punishment described by Stair, Turner, Brown, and others was the enforced biting, five times, of the noxious *teve* plant, which besides inflicting intense agony on an offender would cause his gums to become so inflamed, according to Krämer, "that death often resulted." Stair also lists the punishments of being forced to handle poisonous spined fish, of being exposed in the broiling sun, and of being suspended head downward for many hours from a tall coconut palm. Again, in *Institutions and Customs of the Samoans*, mention is made of a punishment of olden times in which an offender, having been tied hand and foot, was "thrown into the pigsty, to eat and sleep with the pigs until he died."⁸

These personal punishments, with the exception of severe ad hoc beatings and expulsion from village groups such as the fono and 'aumaga, are now no longer practiced, their place having been taken by an extension of the ancient Samoan custom of imposing fines. As Turner notes, it was common in nineteenth-century Samoa for a fono to impose "fines of large quantities of food, which provide a feast for the entire village." Brown mentions fines of "as much as a thousand head of taro, and a thousand sand fish, all cooked," or of "from one to twenty or thirty pigs."

Under Samoan custom it is usual when an offender is an untitled individual for a fine to be imposed on his chief, who then draws on the general resources of the family of which he is head. In January 1943, for example, when a 23-year-old man surreptitiously raped an 18-year-old girl of another family, his chief was fined two pigs and ten six-pound tins of meat by a specially summoned juridical fono; this food was then shared among all the other families of Sa'anapu.⁹

It is also customary for fines to be imposed on any chief who fails to obey a ruling of the fono to which he belongs. It is usual, for example, for a fono to require all its members to plant a certain amount of taro, or to make standard contributions to village enterprises, such as the building of a school. Those chiefs who do not meet these obligations are almost always penalized, the most common fine in the 1940s and 1960s being a six-pound tin of meat. Both the imposition and the collection of these and other fines are strict, the principle being, as a senior talking chief of Sa'anapu remarked to his fellow chiefs in 1967, that "no one may make light of something that has been decided upon by the fono."

This principle is also followed in all the other social groupings of a village community, such as the 'aumaga. For example, in 1942 the Sa'anapu 'aumaga ruled that all of its members were to join in a malaga to a village on the north coast of Upolu. When one of them, Filipina, aged about 40, disobeyed this injunction he was fined £2, and when he refused to pay this fine he was expelled from the 'aumaga and formally ostracized, all other members being forbidden, on pain of a heavy fine, to communicate with him. After a few months of this punishment Filipina formally admitted his wrongful behavior and, on the presentation of a large pig and other food to the 'aumaga in lieu of the fine he had refused to pay, was readmitted to its membership.

In other village groups, such as church choirs, there are often elaborate sets of rules, each with its own fine for disobedience. In 1943 the church choir of Sa'anapu had a total of some thirty finable offenses, ranging from a fine of sixpence for sitting down too quickly after the singing of a hymn, to £1 for the divulging of a choral arrangement to a rival village. As this example indi-

cates, the imposition of punishment is very much a part of the religious life of Samoa. Thus, it is commonplace to hear Samoan pastors admonishing their congregations that eternal torment in hellfire is the punishment of those who disobey the commandments of God. This notion is no great novelty to Samoans, for their traditional afterworld, as Stair records, contained, in addition to an Elysium called Puloa, a dread place of punishment known as Sa le Fe'e. Again, very strict discipline, with the infliction of physical punishment as necessary, is maintained during church services. For example, Moore and Farrington, when they attended a protestant service in Tutuila in 1930, noted that an elder armed with a fly switch patrolled the church swatting unruly boys and shaking them "by winding his fingers in their hair." Often the punishment inflicted for misbehavior at services or when under religious instruction is more severe, and I have recorded several instances of both male and female adolescents having had a bone fractured by a punishing blow inflicted by an irate pastor.¹⁰

Fines may also be imposed directly upon an individual when marked disrespect has been shown to a chief. In 1946, for example, when Pomate threatened a talking chief with a bush knife during an argument over a plot of land, the fono summarily sentenced him to banishment from Sa'anapu. When Pomate pleaded for his case to be reconsidered, he was made to crawl on hands and knees with head bowed into the house where the chiefs of Sa'anapu were meeting in fono, and to remain in this abject posture while his behavior was condemned in the roundest terms. Pomate, who was married to a Roman Catholic woman from the nearby village of Mulivai, was in the habit of attending Mass with her there on Sundays. From the nineteenth century onward Sa'anapu had been exclusively Protestant, with one of the main rules of its fono being that any villager who became a Roman Catholic must leave the community. Pomate was heavily fined and told that he could remain in Sa'anapu only if he gave up attending Roman Catholic services, an imposition which, in fact, drove him from his natal village.

In 1966 I witnessed another case of severe punitive action by

chiefs, which involved the disputed boundary of the plantation of Samala, an untitled man of Sa'anapu. Several chiefs, acting on behalf of the fono, marked the boundary by planting a line of breadfruit saplings, depriving Samala of a few yards of land to which he claimed he was entitled. Samala uprooted these cuttings and threatened to shoot the chiefs who had planted them. At a specially summoned fono Samala was fined one bullock and one very large pig, animals he had been rearing for some years with the intention of selling them. When Samala saw his animals being killed he threw himself on the ground, groaning and weeping in a paroxysm of frustrated rage, and tore the shirt from his body in a violent display of redirected aggression.

The imposition of heavy punishment frequently provokes rage, yet the penalized individual well knows that any action he might take against the chiefs of his community would be certain to lead to even heavier punishment. This situation sometimes has tragic consequences, as in the case of Tulei, an untitled man of the village of Safa'atua. Early one morning in June 1966, the boundaries of a plot of newly cleared agricultural land of the family to which Tulei belonged were formally inspected, as is usual in Samoan villages, by the chiefs. During this inspection Tulei was overheard to say of these chiefs, "What's the point of their frequent measuring of the land, the earth is befouled by their tread." After the inspection the chiefs at once met in fono and imposed on Tulei's family the fine of ten sows, ten cases of tinned fish, five large tins of biscuits, and 5000 coconuts of taro, stipulating that this food was to be provided if not that very day then without fail on the morrow, under the threat of further penalties. Their fono was still in progress when the news reached them that Tulei, having heard of the severity of this punishment, had killed himself with a shotgun.

Samoa then, far from possessing a social order that "is kind to all and does not make sufficient demands upon any," as Mead would have it, has a culture in which it is traditional to have recourse to punishment, and frequently very severe punishment, in the interests of obedience and respect for authority. Furthermore, those who have erred are expected to accept their punishment without demur. This is especially so when a chief is

being found fault with by his fellow matai. I was present in October 1966 when a 53-year-old titular chief, who had disobeyed a ruling of the Sa'anapu fono, tried to justify his actions. He was peremptorily told that his only course was to admit the error of his ways and to sit patiently without a word while the indignation of his polity was vented upon him. This, as we shall see, is what is also required of children who are being reprimanded or punished by their parents, or, for that matter, by anyone else set in authority over them.

seminated that many came to believe that Samoan culture included, in John Honigmann's words, "institutionalized permartial sexuality." An early adherent of this view was Boas' student Robert Lowie, who said in reviewing *Coming of Age in Samoa*, "Miss Mead's graphic picture of Polynesian free love is convincing. It falls into line with the reports of early travellers."¹

This judgment may possibly have been true for Tahiti, the Nouvelle Cythère of Bougainville, to which Lowie had made a "purely recreational" visit in 1925. It does not hold, however, for Samoa, which in numerous respects, as Burrows has documented, significantly differs from Eastern Polynesia. In no area is this difference in culture more marked than in that of sexual mores. Thus, as Charles Wilkes, a well-informed early traveler to the Samoan islands, noted in 1839, among the Samoans "there was no indiscriminate intercourse," the women of Samoa "exhibiting a strange contrast to those of Tahiti." Again, the Rarotongan teacher Ta'unga, in a report written in Ta'u in 1862, recorded that in Manu'a fornication was "not habitual" as in Rarotonga. This difference in culture stems from the fact that in pagan Samoa *taupous*, or ceremonial virgins, occupied positions of great social importance and virginity at marriage was very highly prized. So, as Pritchard noted in 1866, among the Samoans "the chastity of the daughters of the chiefs was the pride and boast of their tribes," with old *duennas* guarding "their virtue and their honor from an early age." Pritchard is here referring specifically to the *taupou* system, in discussing the values of which Krämer observed in 1902: "The esteem felt for maidenhood in the old heathen times reminds us of the Vestal Virgins, of the Huarimaguas of the Guansches, and of the Inca Maidens of the Sun, this esteem placing the Samoan people on an ethical height that accords with the spirit of their traditions." Again, the Samoans themselves give a special preeminence to their ceremonial virgins. At the constitutional convention of Western Samoa, for example, one of the chiefly delegates proudly declared that compared with Samoa there is "no country under the sun" where the "question of virgins" is "so upheld."²

How did Mead depict the *taupou* system in which this high

16

Sexual Mores and Behavior

THAT *COMING OF AGE IN SAMOA* so rapidly attracted popular attention was due more than anything else to Mead's alluring portrayal of Samoa as a paradise of adolescent free love. In September 1928, in the *American Mercury*, Miss Mead was said to have found in Samoa an entire absence of the sex problems of western civilization, while in Frederick O'Brien's estimation *Coming of Age in Samoa* was an extraordinary accomplishment in "the domain of erotics." These judgments are understandable, for it was Mead's claim that in Samoa, in the romantic South Seas, there was a people with one of the smoothest sex adjustments in the world, among whom, before marriage, love-making—which was their "pastime *par excellence*"—was free, and girls deferred marriage "through as many years of casual love-making as possible." Indeed, so widely was this view dis-

valuation of virginity is conspicuously expressed? The taupou, she tells us, who has the tokens of her virginity ceremonially taken at marriage by the talking chief of her bridegroom, is "accepted" from the "free and easy experimentation" of other young females. Further, although this virginity-testing ceremony was "theoretically observed at weddings of people of all ranks," it was possible, according to Mead, for a taupou who was not a virgin, to tell this to the officiating talking chief, and so "not be ashamed before all the people." The taupou system was thus depicted by Mead in 1928 as a curious appendage to the general practice of "promiscuity before marriage" in which the "onus of virginity" was taken from "the whole young female population" and placed on the taupou, the "legal requirement" of her virginity being something that could easily be circumvented with the connivance of the talking chief of her intended husband. This, as we shall see, is a confused travesty of the traditional taupou system of Samoa.³

As noted in Chapter 8, in pagan Samoa a titular chief had the right to confer on one of the sexually mature virginal girls of his family the rank of taupou, the girl chosen being usually one of his own daughters. In the Samoan family, female agnates possess a special rank vis-à-vis their brothers, and so a taupou was the apotheosis of the honorific standing of a chiefly family, with her hand in marriage being much sought after by other titular chiefs of rank, or by their heirs apparent. A taupou, like a titular chief, was given a ceremonial installation, in which all the members of a local polity participated, after which, as the Samoans phrase it, "they protectively encircle the luster of that lady." Such taupou were to be found in every local polity in which there were titular chiefs, and their traditional titles were known and revered throughout Samoa. Thus, Stevenson calls the taupou the sacred maid of her village, a phrase that conveys something of the special aura of her position. A taupou was, for example, entitled to sit on ceremonial occasions in that part of a house reserved by custom for high-ranking chiefs, and on such occasions was addressed in honorific language. As Ella notes, from the time of her first menstruation a Samoan girl was "strictly watched and guarded." A taupou in particular was

placed in the care of the *auauluma*, a group consisting primarily of the sexually mature unmarried female agnates of a village. Once within the *auauluma*, she was assiduously chaperoned by its old women, who, like Spanish duennas, "never for a moment" lost sight of her.⁴

A taupou then was a sexually mature *virgo intacta* of rank. Her virginity was distinctively different from the virginity valued within Christendom. The Christian ideal, which stemmed from the musings of Gregory of Nyssa and others on the prelapsarian virginity of Adam and Eve, aspired to an asexual mode of existence and the overcoming of all concupiscence in the interests of a total identification with the risen Christ. The Samoan taupou, in contrast, was an engaging young lady of rank, enchantingly erotic in her very virginity, which in the eyes of Samoans gave her unique value, it being an ineluctable fact that a maiden's virginity can be given up but once. And so, young chieftains would vie for the special prestige associated with the deflowering of a taupou.⁵

In John Williams' journal of 1832 there are several descriptions of taupous. Decorated with necklets and bracelets, their skins gleaming with scented oil, their breasts tinged with an orange-colored powder made from tumeric, and shaggy white mats or skirts of red and green cordyline leaves about their loins girded up to leave the left thigh completely bare, they were highly sexual objects; indeed, according to Brown, even the pubic hair of the village virgin was oiled and combed. Their virginal state, furthermore, was made plain for all to see by the tresses of curled, and sometimes artificially colored, hair at the sides of their partially shaven heads, a style affected by all virgins of rank.⁶

When a titular chief or his heir apparent (*manaia*) took a fancy to some taupou, a formal courting party was sent to her family to sound out the possibility of a union. This delicate task was entrusted to talking chiefs so that the alii or manaia, who did not accompany them, would not be too painfully shamed should they be turned down. As Turner notes, when it came to deciding whom she should marry, a daughter was "at the absolute disposal of her father, or elder brother," with, in the case of

a taupou, the whole of her village becoming involved. So as Aiono Ma'ia'i, a modern Samoan scholar, has written, "it is not the wishes of the *taupou* but those of her village that count."⁷

When an agreement had been reached, the taupou was accompanied to the village of her intended husband by a large traveling party consisting of members of her extended family, her aualuma, and various of the titular and talking chiefs of her settlement, bearing with them a dowry of fine mats and other valuables. The ceremonies lasted for about three days, and were marked by large-scale exchanges of property, with the amount given being a measure of the rank of the donors. Often the amount of property exchanged was very substantial. Turner mentions fifty or a hundred fine mats and two or three hundred pieces of bark cloth being heaped before a bridegroom, and Williams records seeing a woman to whose family three hundred hogs had been given. These massive exchanges were then a major facet of the taupou system, in which, as Williamson remarks, virginity was "a social asset rather than a moral virtue."⁸

The culminating point in the marriage of a taupou was her ceremonial deforation in public. The account that follows is based on sixteen cases taken from the literature and my own field notes. The earliest of these deforations is that described in John Williams' journal of 1832. The exchange of property having taken place, the bridegroom seated himself on the ceremonial ground of his village. The young woman was then taken by the hand by her elder brother or some other relative, and led toward her bridegroom, dressed in a fine mat edged with red feathers, her body gleaming with scented oil. On arriving immediately in front of him she threw off this mat and stood naked while he ruptured her hymen with "two fingers of his right hand." If a hemorrhage ensued the bridegroom drew his fingers over the bride's upper lip, before holding up his hand for all present to witness the proof of her virginity. At this the female supporters of the bride rushed forward to obtain a portion to smear upon themselves before dancing naked and hitting their heads with stones until their blood ran down in streams, in sympathy with, and in honor of, the virgin bride. The husband, meanwhile, wiped his hands on a piece of white barkcloth which

he wore around his waist for the rest of the day as a token of respect for his wife. With the bride's ceremonial deforation accomplished, the marriage was usually consummated forthwith, with the utmost decorum, in a screened-off part of a house.⁹

In the event of there being no hemorrhage, the bridegroom Williams reports, repeated the operation. If no proof of the bride's virginity was obtained, she was sorely abused by her friends, called a prostitute, and hastened away, while her intended husband, refusing to take her to wife, at once reclaimed his property. Sometimes, according to Pritchard, when a taupou was thus exposed as a nonvirgin, "her brother, or even her father himself, rushed upon her with their clubs, and dispatched her on the scene of her fatal exposure."¹⁰

In the case of a high-ranking taupou, the deforation ceremony was even more elaborate, being performed, when the bridegroom was a titular chief of high rank, by one of his talking chiefs. We are fortunate in having an eyewitness account of such a ceremony involving the highest-ranking of all Samoan chiefs, the Tui Manu'a. It took place in 1840 and was witnessed by John Jackson, a young Englishman who had been kidnapped by the Manu'ans from a South Seas whaler out of anthropological curiosity.¹¹

The union witnessed by Jackson was that of the Tui Manu'a and a taupou of Fitiuta, the high-ranking primordial settlement of Manu'a. The bride, Jackson reports, was led onto a mat on which the Tui Manu'a was standing. About her loins was a large fine mat, edged with red feathers, on her forehead a pearly white decoration made from nautilus shells, and part of her hair had been dyed a reddish hue. A large bowl of kava had been prepared, and as the cup-bearer, with traditional aplomb, walked forward with the cup of the Tui Manu'a, he was accompanied by another of the Tui Manu'a's retinue (almost certainly one of his talking chiefs) holding in his hand a piece of white bark cloth. At the moment the Tui Manu'a lifted his kava to his lips, so expressing the supremacy of his rank, the taupou at his side was ceremonially deflowered by his talking chief.¹²

As described in Chapter 8, in a Samoan kava ceremony the titular chief of highest rank receives his kava before all others,

and is later presented with the choicest and most succulent foods, having to these goods a socially recognized priority of access. In pagan Samoa this same principle applied to the sexual possession of women, and it thus became a matter of the greatest moment to any man of rank that he should make quite certain of his absolute priority of access to the woman who was to become his wife. So, within the traditional Samoan system of rank, the proof of a bride's virginity was regarded, as Krämer remarks, as "indispensable." The public testing of her virginity was the established method of avoiding any possibility of the bridegroom's being shamed by some other male who might secretly have had sexual connection with her. It was thus the specific duty of the officiating talking chief to make absolutely certain that a taupou was indeed a virgin. Indeed, so seriously did the pagan Samoans take the issue of rank and sexual liaisons that, as Harbutt records, if a female had lived as a wife with a high chief, she was thereafter prohibited from contracting a new marriage, with any breach of this rule being, according to Pritchard, a sufficient cause for war.¹³

Female virginity, then, was very much the leitmotif of the sexual mores of the pagan Samoans. Indeed, for an uninformed outsider it is difficult to appreciate the peculiarly exalted significance, stemming from the notion of peerlessness, that the Samoans, with deeply felt emotion, once gave to their female virgins of high rank. Some inkling of it may be had from the marriage songs that were ecstatically intoned when it was proved, by her ceremonial defloration, that a manaia had succeeded in securing for himself and his local polity a virgin of rank. A stanza of one such marriage song, making direct reference to the public defloration of a taupou, runs as follows:

The way into the vagina, the way into the vagina,
The sacred fluid gushes forth, the sacred fluid gushes forth,
All others have failed to achieve entry, all others have failed to achieve entry,
Lilomaiaava is the manaia,
Samalaulu, the titled taupou;

He is first by being foremost, being first he is foremost;
O to be foremost!
The dart has reached its goal,
O, what a goal!¹⁴

The Samoan term for the hymen is '*afu'afu*, derived from the proto-Polynesian *kahu*, meaning a covering. In Samoan the term '*afu* refers, among other things, to the fine mats presented by the family of a bride to the family of a bridegroom. These mats are by custom fringed with the beautiful red feathers of a parakeet, which in Manu'a as elsewhere in Samoa are recognized a symbolic of hymenal blood. Among Samoans there is still a pronounced mystique surrounding fine mats. When displayed they are praised in adoring tones, in traditional phrases such as *Saō! Fa'alalelei!* (meaning "Thank you! How beautiful!"—*lalelei* being a term that specifically refers to beauty in women). Fine mats are thus a cultural symbol of the traditional taupou, who in a defloration ceremony has been proved to be a virgin and so, within the values of the fa'aSamoa, a true *tamaita'i*, or lady of excellence.¹⁵

As Williams notes, a female found not to be a virgin at a defloration ceremony was called a prostitute. Prostitute, however, is only a very approximate translation of the term *pa'umutu*, by which such a female who had failed to preserve her virginity was publicly shamed. Intimately related with the cult of virginity, this word is derived from *pa'u*, meaning skin or hymenal membrane, and *mutu*, cut off or defective. It is a very heavy slur, and a common cause of strife among women when improperly used. Indeed, so crucial an issue is this that a young woman who has been unjustly subjected to the insult of being called a *pa'umutu* will sometimes obtain and make public a medical certificate as to her virginity. In November 1963, for example, Tala, a 20-year-old married woman of Aleipata, Upolu, accused Loto, a 19-year-old girl, of being a *pa'umutu*. Loto traveled all the way to the General Hospital in Apia (about 40 miles away) to have herself gynecologically examined by the medical superintendent. His report confirmed that her hymen was intact. With

Loto's virginity thus established, the police charged Tala with using insulting words. Tala was convicted and fined £5. She confessed to the police that she had acted out of jealousy after her husband had boasted, falsely as she now knew, of having deflowered Loto, and having had sexual intercourse with her. The same values were in force in the 1920s, as evidenced by Dr. Peter Buck's report that in December 1927 a young man was convicted for having falsely claimed that he had deflowered and had coitus with a local girl.¹⁶

The cult of virginity, which is central to the sexual mores of the Samoans, is also found (as Mead seems to have been unaware when she went to Samoa in 1925) in Tonga, the Lau Islands, Fiji, the Gilbert Islands, Tuvalu, and Tikopia, and is one of the principal characteristics of the cultures of Western as against Eastern Polynesia. For example, Gifford reports of Tonga that a virgin of chiefly rank was called a *taupoou*, and that "a crucial part of the marriage ritual there was the testing of the bride by the bridegroom (with his finger) to determine if she were a virgin"; and Laura Thompson records that girls in the Lau Islands, who do not marry until at least 18 years old, desist from accepting lovers before marriage from fear of being ridiculed and reviled at their weddings when their virginity is publicly tested. Firth describes how in Tikopia males exalt and swagger in the possession of "the treasure that no other man has touched," and relates an instance in which a young man of rank, having found a young woman to whom he was attracted to be not a virgin, commanded her to swim out to sea, which in her shame she did, and was never seen again. A somewhat comparable case is known to me in which a highly religious Samoan girl of 22 cut her own throat in shame after it became public knowledge that she had, through surreptitious rape, lost her virginity. Again, in Samoa, as in Tikopia, young men are greatly given to boasting about having deflowered a virgin, this being an aspect of the traditional rivalry throughout Samoa on the part of man-ala and titular chiefs for the possession of virgins of rank. Indeed, a titular chief acquired great fame if he was successful in ceremonially deflowering a succession of taupou. For example, 'Anapu Tui'i, a high chief of Sa'anapu who died in 1918, is still

remembered as having consummated formally arranged unions with a succession of six taupous from various parts of Samoa, by each of whom he had a child.¹⁷

The individual most celebrated for his zeal and prowess in deflowering virgins is the legendary Vaovasa, of Savai'i. Vaovasa, so the story runs, had accumulated a total of no fewer than ninety-nine maidenheads. Each conquest he had commemorated with a large stone, in the overweening ambition of constructing a wall one hundred stones in length. Having reached ninety-nine, he set out for Falealili on the south coast of Upolu, from whence he would return with, as he vainly thought, his hundredth virgin. As he was paddling back to Savai'i he was accosted by Logona, the manaia of Sa'anapu, standing on a headland with a plaited package in his upraised hand. With unerring aim, Logona hurled this package at Vaovasa's loins. It contained a fluid made up in part of the hymenal blood of Vaovasa's hundredth virgin, whom Logona, with the kind of daring Samoans most admire, had contrived to deflower shortly before Vaovasa's arrival. No shaming of one chief by another could be more complete than this, and so humiliated was Vaovasa that no hundredth stone was ever added to his wall.

These legendary events, which are deeply expressive of Samoan sexual mores, are celebrated in a song of praise to Logona that is known throughout Samoa:

To the westward by the headlands of Utumalama and Utusauva'a

Stood Logona;

In his hand the palm-frond container

Which he hurled at the canoe of Vaovasa.

Loud were the lamentations of the crew of Salemuliaga,

Great the surprise of Vaovasa

As he gazed at his loins.

Alas! a calamity is upon them.

O wanton woman, like an empty shell exposed by the ebbing tide!

Pity these travelers as in sorrow they return to Savai'i
Vaovasa's wall will never be completed.

These heroic happenings are still vividly remembered in Samoa. Some years ago when a traveling party from Satunumafono, the family grouping to which Sa'anapu belongs, ventured to sing this traditional song of praise to Logona at Gataivai, a village in Vaovasa's district, it was more than the local people could bear, and there was an affray.

As this indicates, the sexual mores of pagan Samoa are still, in many ways, extant. Youths of no particular rank still vie with one another, and given half a chance will boast of their exploits in deflowering virgins. A Samoan youth, it is said, keeps count of his conquests, and I have often sat in an 'aumaga and heard bragging of such feats. Again, there are numerous terms, such as *le o'o* ("to fall short"), which are widely used to refer to, and shame, a man whose attempt to secure a virgin for himself has failed.

Samoa, then, is a society predicated on rank, in which female virgins are both highly valued and eagerly sought after. Moreover, although these values are especially characteristic of the higher levels of the rank structure, they also permeate to its lower levels, so that virtually every family cherishes the virginity of its daughters. For example, as Turner noted in 1861, and as Stuebel confirms, although the marriage ceremonies of common people were marked by less display than those of people of high rank, they still involved the testing of the bride's virginity. In other words, while the virginity of the nubile daughters of families of high rank was a matter of quite crucial importance to all concerned, the values of the taupou system also traditionally applied to the whole of Samoan society, albeit less stringently to those of lower rank.¹⁸

It is thus customary in Samoa, as Mead quite failed to report, for the virginity of an adolescent daughter, whatever her rank, to be safeguarded by her brothers, who exercise an active surveillance over her comings and goings, especially at night. Brothers will upbraid, and sometimes beat, a sister should she be found in the company of a boy suspected of having designs on her virginity, while the boy involved is liable to be assaulted with great ferocity. Gerber, from her work in Tutuila in the early 1970s, records that many girls reported that "they were

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afraid of their brothers beating both them and their boyfriends if they were found together"; while Young (who worked in both western and eastern Samoa in the 1970s), writes that a brother will fly into a "killing rage" at an attempt to seduce his sister. To cite a case from my own researches, on a Sunday in June 1959, Tautalafua, aged 17, found his 18-year-old classificatory sister sitting under a breadfruit tree at about 9:00 in the evening with Vave, a 20-year-old youth from another family. He struck Vave with such violence as to fracture his jaw in two places. For this attack he was later sentenced to six weeks' imprisonment. Again, in February 1964, when a girl of 15 was found at 10:30 P.M. with Tali, a youth of 19 from another village, two of her brothers at once attacked Tali, wounding him severely on the forehead with a thrown stone. Both were later sentenced to two months' imprisonment. On such occasions the girl involved is also liable to be scolded and punished by an adult male of her family. In December 1967 a 19-year-old girl of Sa'anapu, sitting on the malae, continued talking to some visiting youths after the sounding of the village curfew at 10:00 P.M. Her 30-year-old uncle knocked her to the ground and chastised her, complaining that after having been educated at great expense she was putting her maidenhood in jeopardy.¹⁹

With the interdicting of public deforation by Christian missions, the taupou system of pagan Samoa underwent major changes. Ceremonial deflorations, when they were arranged, took place within a house, behind a screen. Again, from the nineteenth century onward the house of the pastor supplanted the aualuma as a place for the virgin daughters of a village, and the family of any youth who attempted to seduce one of these institutionally secluded virgins was heavily fined, and even banished, by the fono of his village. This, as Holmes confirms, was the situation in Manu'a at the time of Mead's researches, as indeed it was throughout Samoa in the 1920s. Thus, of the twenty-five adolescent girls aged, according to Mead, from 14 or 15 to 19 or 20, on whose behavior she based her conclusions, nine are listed in table 1 in *Coming of Age in Samoa* as being resident in a pastor's household. Further, of these same twenty-five girls, no fewer than thirteen are listed as having had no "heterosexual

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experience." In other words, more than half of those in this sample were virgins on Mead's own evidence, with one of them being a girl of 19 who in addition to being resident of the household of the pastor of Si'ufaga was a communicant member of the church. This situation, which Mead herself records, is obviously incongruent with her generalizations about Samoan female adolescents: more than half of the adolescent girls about whom she wrote in *Coming of Age in Samoa* were in fact virgins, and most of them, furthermore, institutionally secluded virgins.²⁰

The traditional Samoan ideal of chastity for females before marriage tended, as Shore has noted, to be "quite rigidly upheld for the holder of a *taupou* title"; in Mead's words, it was virtually "a legal requirement." To what extent, then, in Samoa in the 1920s did the ideal of chastity for females before marriage also apply to adolescent girls who were not of *taupou* rank? According to the elders of Ta'u who, when I interviewed them, well recollected the state of their culture in the mid 1920s, the requirement that sexually mature adolescent girls should remain chaste, was, at that time, very much the ideal of their strict protestant society. Thus, in the 1920s sexually mature adolescent girls were enjoined to become members of the Ekalesia, or communicant body of the church, it being one of the rules of the Ekalesia that sexual intercourse outside of marriage was strictly forbidden to its members (see Chapter 12). That in the prudish Christian society of Samoa in the 1920s, sexual intercourse between unmarried persons was held to be both a sin and a crime is confirmed by cases in the archives of the high court of American Samoa. For example, on 6 May 1929 in the district court at Fagatoga, Lafitaga, an unmarried man, having admitted that he knew it was wrong for a man and woman to have "intercourse with each other unless they were married," was accused of committing "the crime of fornication" by "jewdly and lasciviously cohabiting" with a woman while not being legally married to her.²¹

Comparable values obtained in Western Samoa during this same period and also, as I was able to observe at first hand, during the 1940s. In 1967 I was able to complete a detailed survey of

the incidence of virginity in adolescent girls by making, with the assistance of my wife, a census of all the young females of a village on the south coast of Upolu born within the period 1945-1955. This gave a sample of sixty-seven individuals, varying in age from 12 to 22. We collected information on whether these girls and young women were virgins and whether they were members of the Ekalesia. If, to enable a comparison with Mead's data, we take from this sample the forty-one girls aged between 14 and 19, then thirty of them, or 73 percent, were virgins. The incidence of virginity in each of the years within this age range was as follows:²²

Age	Number of		% virgins
	girls	virgins	
14	4	4	100
15	10	8	80
16	7	5	71
17	8	5	62
18	7	6	85
19	5	2	40
Total	41	30	73

In another detailed study, also in Upolu, of twenty-five women born between 1924 and 1947 whose ages were exactly known and for whom accurate data were available on the dates of birth of their children, we were able to calculate approximate age at first conception. In this sample only 12 percent had conceived when under seventeen and a half years of age—the youngest at sixteen years and three months. The mean age at first conception was nineteen and three-quarters years.

As this and the other evidence I have cited indicates, after the mid nineteenth century, when a puritanical Christian sexual morality was added to an existing traditional cult of virginity, Samoa became a society in which chastity was, in Shore's words, "the ideal for all women before marriage," and in which this religiously and culturally sanctioned ideal strongly influenced the actual behavior of adolescent girls. Although de-

spite these severe moral values and the protective attention of their brothers, some girls (about 20 percent on the basis of the sample I have just discussed) became sexually active at about 15, the majority of pubescent females remained virgins until they were 17 or 18 years of age before going on an elopement. Further, the furtive sexual liaisons in which a minor proportion of adolescent females became, either willingly or unwillingly, involved were recognized by all concerned as shameful departures from the well-defined ideal of chastity.²³

It is understandable, then, why Samoans are perturbed by Mead's depiction of them as a people for whom free lovemaking is "expected" among adolescent girls, so that the Samoans have come to be classed in the literature of anthropology as "one of the best known cases of institutionalized premarital sexuality." This conclusion is indeed so posterously at variance with the realities of Samoan life that a special explanation is called for; as I shall discuss further in Chapter 19, all the indications are that the young Margaret Mead was, as a kind of joke, deliberately misled by her adolescent informants.²⁴

While in all the Samoan communities I have studied a few girls remained virgins until they married in a religious ceremony, most of them lost the status of virgin by eloping from their families with the man who succeeded in deflowering them. Such an elopement, which is termed an *avaga*, is taken as establishing that the woman involved had previously been a virgin, and by eloping she avoids the shame of being subsequently revealed as some other man's *pa'umutu*. As Pritchard notes, a girl need spend no more than one night in the house of the man with whom she elopes for their union to be recognized and for any child born to them to be viewed as legitimate.²⁵ In many cases the deflorator that precedes an *avaga* is the culmination of a seduction that the girl herself has actively encouraged. In other instances, the deflorator occurs entirely without the girl's consent, through the use of either surreptitious or direct force; yet in these instances too, unless she follows the relatively rare course of going to the police, the girl will elope with her assailant to save her reputation and publicly demonstrate the fact of her erstwhile virginity.

A girl who elopes after a forced defloration will usually return to her natal household after an absence of one or more nights. Having lost the status of virgin, she is now more likely to accept the advances of a man; however, as N.A. Rowe, who was in Samoa at the same time as Mead, observed in the 1920s, "a Samoan girl's moral code opposes her going with a man unless, by living with him, she may be recognized as his wife." In cases where an *avaga* has been sought by a girl, it may lead to a lasting union, with the elopement being followed in some cases by a religious ceremony.²⁶

Although, in Wendt's words, "marriage in church to a religious, conscientious, obedient virgin" is, in Samoa, "the dream of every aristocratic properly brought up son," this dream is not very commonly realized in the population at large. Of the marriages of the thirty-nine untitled males resident in Sa'anapu in January 1943, thirty-eight had originated in an *avaga*, followed in eleven instances (usually after some years) by a religious ceremony, and only one had begun with a religious ceremony. Under Samoan custom, however, an *avaga* is fully accepted as a form of marriage, with any sexual approach by another to either partner being viewed as attempted adultery.²⁷

It was very much part of Mead's depiction of Samoan sexual mores that, in addition to free lovemaking being expected among adolescents, "adultery was not regarded as very serious." Many adulteries occurred, according to Mead, which hardly threatened the continuity of established relationships, and a man who seduced his neighbor's wife had simply to settle with his neighbor, as the society was not interested. To these assertions she added the claim that the Samoans had eliminated "many of the attitudes which have afflicted mankind, and perhaps jealousy most importantly of all" and that "jealousy, as a widespread social phenomenon" was "very rare in Samoa."²⁸

All of these statements are seriously in error. As Pritchard records, and as Wilkes, Turner, Stuebel, and Brown confirm, Samoan custom in former times sanctioned "the summary punishment of adultery by death," with, as Turner also notes, the injured party being "at liberty to seek revenge on the brother, son or any member of the family to which the guilty party be-

longed." Again, an adulteress was liable, as Stuebel records and Turner and Brown confirm, to be punished by having her head fractured and bones broken or by having her nose or an ear cut off and cast away.²⁹

Although these extreme punishments had been interdicted by the time of Mead's researches in Manu'a, adultery nonetheless remained a serious delict. It was listed, in recognition of Samoan attitudes, in the Regulations and Orders for the Government of American Samoa that were in force in the 1920s, as an offense for which those guilty "shall be fined not more than one hundred dollars, or imprisoned not more than twelve months, or both," and in the court archives of American Samoa for the 1920s there are cases of both men and women being fined for adultery. Again, the Royal Commission that met in Western Samoa in 1927 was told by Toelupe, the chairman of the Fono of Faipule, that adultery was "a very serious charge in Samoa" for which an offender together with his family might be banished from his village. This was also the custom, going well beyond the law of the day, in Manu'a in the 1920s, where, as I was informed by the talking chiefs of Si'ufaga in 1967, "the judgment of a local polity is exceedingly severe in the case of adultery, with the land of an offender being taken from him."³⁰

It was thus by no means true, as Mead asserts, that Samoan society is "not interested" in the offense of adultery. Rather, as soon as an adultery, either actual or attempted, becomes known a special juridical fono is promptly summoned. Thus, in Sa'anapu in February 1967 when Seu, an untitled 28-year-old married man with two children, was discovered to have made a sexual advance to a 17-year-old virgin of another titular family to whom he was distantly related, a fono manu was at once summoned. At this fono the chiefs of these two families, as well as Seu, were berated in the most extreme terms. Seu's action, said the officiating talking chief, was "a happening frightening to both ghosts and men." Then, turning in the direction of Seu and his father, who were held to be principally responsible, he shouted with great emotional force: "Ugly! Ugly! I am ashamed even to mention your act! It is forbidden! It is forbidden! Shame on you! Shame on you! Shame on you!" Seu's family was fined

two large pigs, two large tins of biscuits, and one hundred coconuts of taro, while the family of the girl he had been with was fined half this amount.

Such a judicial fono is summoned promptly to forestall the possibility of revenge being taken by those who have been offended by an attempted or actual adultery. The taking of private revenge is by no means uncommon. In 1924, for example, as F. H. Flaherty recounts, when a young man from another village made advances to the wife of the son of the pastor of Safune, he was later accosted by two men of Safune, accused of having done "a very wrong thing *fa'aSamoa*," and so severely wounded by a stab in the neck that he subsequently died. On other occasions, adultery may lead to much more widespread trouble. Fay Calkins records a case in which a chief named Ofu, having eloped with the wife of another chief of the village of Salani, in Upolu, was subjected to the punishment of saisai (see Chapter 13) being "tied to a pole and presented to the offended chief for roasting," and then banished from Salani forever. This incident split the village in two, various of its chiefs finishing up in hospital and in jail, and twenty years elapsed before they met again as a single fono.³¹

Adultery in Samoa is then very far from being, as Mead asserted, merely a personal peccadillo; nor is it true that the Samoans have eliminated jealousy, as Leslie A. White was prepared to believe, arguing on the basis of Mead's reports that jealousy is not a natural emotion. In fact, in the words of C. C. Marsack, who was for many years the Chief Justice of Western Samoa, "Samoans are extremely prone to fits of jealousy . . . A considerable proportion of cases of assault coming before the Courts—and such cases were very numerous—arose from jealousy." Many other observers of Samoan behavior have come to the same conclusion. Brenchley, for example, who visited Samoa in 1865, wrote of Samoan men being extremely jealous, and keeping "a sharp lookout on their wives."³²

Sexual jealousy, furthermore, is most commonly displayed in cases of actual or suspected adultery. In 1956, for example, after Mata, the wife of Tavita, had accused his older brother, Tule, of making sexual approaches to her during her husband's absence,

Tavita attacked his brother, stabbing him five times in the back and neck. Again, when in 1964 Salau saw a schoolteacher making advances to his wife, he slashed him six times with a long-bladed bush knife, inflicting grievous wounds on his arms and shoulders. In court, where Salau was sentenced to six months' imprisonment, his wife attributed this attack to his intense sexual jealousy.³³

Women are also prone to fits of jealousy. As Gerber records, one of her informants in Tutuila, in explaining the Samoan word for sexual jealousy, *fua*, said: "That's if a woman gets angry if her husband goes to another woman. Then she says, 'Go to her, don't come back!' Then she starts a fight with the other woman." In one case, Gerber reports, a wife went looking for her husband's lover with a rope to strangle her. As this suggests, some women when jealous can be as violent as any man. In 1964, for example, Mele, aged 29, was left for another woman by her husband, Teo, soon after the birth of their second child. She sought out Teo and the woman and attacked them with a bush knife as they were sleeping together. She was later convicted of inflicting grievous bodily harm and sentenced to fifteen months' imprisonment. Jealousy, then, is by no means absent from the behavior of Samoans, and they most definitely do not—as Murdock, echoing Mead, asserted in 1934—"laugh incredulously at tales of passionate jealousy."³⁴

Yet another aspect of Mead's depiction of Samoa as a place where "love between the sexes is a light and pleasant dance" is her claim that among Samoans "male sexuality" is "never defined as aggressiveness that must be curbed." Thus in 1928 she categorically stated that "the idea of forceful rape or of any sexual act to which both participants do not give themselves freely is completely foreign to the Samoan mind."³⁵ These assertions are, once again, wholly misleading, for in fact the incidence of rape in Samoa, both surreptitious and forceful, is among the highest to be found anywhere in the world.

Surreptitious rape, or *moetotolo* (literally "sleep crawling") is a peculiarly Samoan custom in which a man, having crept into a house under cover of darkness, sexually assaults a sleeping woman. As Mead herself notes, there was in pagan Samoa

on the part of the manaias and their male followers a preoccupation with the abduction and deflowering of the taupou of some rival local polity, such a flamboyant feat being celebrated far and wide by its perpetrators as a victory over their rivals. It was, however, a dangerous pursuit, for an abduction party discovered lurking on the outskirts of a rival village would be fiercely attacked, and, as Mead correctly reports, the abduction and forced defloration of a taupou was sometimes the occasion of warfare between villages. There is throughout Samoa a comparable preoccupation on the part of young men in general with the deflowering, by whatever means, of any sexually mature virgin, a success in this activity being deemed a personal triumph and a demonstration of masculinity. Given this preoccupation, rape, both surreptitious and forcible, is a common occurrence in Samoa. While in Samoa Mead had virtually no contact with male groups, and thus she failed to understand this situation. Although she refers to moetotolo behavior as "surreptitious rape" and as "definitely abnormal," she goes on to interpret this custom, quite mistakenly, as the stealthy appropriation of "the favors that are meant for another," the sleep crawler relying, so she claims, on a girl's "expecting a lover" or on "the chance that she will indiscriminately accept any corner." Thus, as viewed by Mead, the custom of moetotolo involves no force, only deceit.³⁶

This is a major misinterpretation. As anyone who has studied the phenomenology of rape will know, successful persuasion by a rapist is an extremely rare event, and, in none of the cases of surreptitious rape which I have investigated has persuasion been the method used by the assailant. The intention of the sleep crawler is, in fact, to creep into a house in which a female virgin is sleeping, and before she has awoken to rape her manually by inserting one or two of his fingers in her vagina, an action patterned on the ceremonial defloration of a taupou. This achieved, the sleep crawler at once or, as is more common, on a convenient subsequent occasion, claims the female he has forcibly deflowered as his wife, telling her in private that she has no choice but to elope with him, and that if she does not elope he will bring shame on her and her family by letting it be known

that she is not a virgin. These mores of the moetotolo are well depicted by the Samoan author Fa'afuina Pula in *The Samoan Dance of Life*, where he describes a Samoan youth waiting for a girl to go to sleep so he might "touch" her genitals ("touch" here being a euphemism for manual defloration), this being, as Fa'afuina Pula observes, a "trick" known to all Samoan youths. If the moetotolo is successful in his clandestine assault on her virginity, Fa'afuina Pula explains, the girl knows that the youth responsible "can go away and boast in front of her whole village . . . and so she will come outside and let him do anything he pleases." Thus, as Matauaina, a taupou of Leasina, Tutuila, stated on 27 September 1922 in the district court of Fagatogo, "when the man came to me as I was sleeping he held me down and put his fingers in my private parts . . . then I sat up and wept, and as it was no use for me to remain in my own family, we went to his family."³⁷

The custom of moetotolo, patterned on the ceremonial defloration of a taupou, is then intrinsic to Samoan culture, having been reported from pagan times, as by Platt in 1836. Further, far from adding "zest to the surreptitious love-making that is conducted at home," as Mead asserts, surreptitious rape is greatly feared by Samoan girls, and is viewed with deadly seriousness by the family of any girl actually assaulted. A surreptitious rapist, if captured, is fiercely beaten by the brothers of his victim and then heavily punished at a specially summoned judicial fono. For example, in 1944 a 19-year-old youth of Sa'anapu was disturbed while attempting a moetotolo on a titular chief's daughter, and lost his loin cloth as he strove to escape. He was banished from the village, and his family was fined two large pigs, two large tins of bisucits, and two hundred corns of taro. Further, the youth himself was ridiculed by being given the demeaning nickname of Moetotolo Telefua, or The Naked Sleep-Crawler. Should a case of moetotolo be reported to the police in Western Samoa it is classed as indecent assault and a criminal offense, with a prison sentence being commonly imposed by the court. For example, when a 34-year-old man who had manually raped a sleeping 17-year-old virgin of Apia village in September 1967 was apprehended by two of her brothers, he was heavily

beaten, then handed over to the police, charged with indecent assault, and later sentenced to three years' imprisonment for his "vicious attack."³⁸

A detailed analysis of fifteen cases of surreptitious rape, drawn mainly from police records, shows that in all cases the victim was sleeping in a house at the time of the assault. Some 75 percent of assaults took place late at night, the remainder early in the morning. All assaults were wholly unexpected, and in no sense sought, by the female victims. In all of the twelve cases for which data are available, finger insertion was attempted; it was achieved in about 60 percent of instances, about half of the victims being virgins. Further, while sleep crawlers usually try to achieve their end by guile, my inquiries showed that there is recourse to violence in about 25 percent of cases.

Sleep crawling, properly described as a form of surreptitious rape, is clearly distinguished by Samoans from forcible rape, in which a man resorts to physical violence to overpower a fully conscious woman and then sexually assault her. In Samoa, however, forcible rape has the peculiar feature that the rapist, immediately after overpowering his victim, attempts to insert one or two of his fingers in her vagina. An analysis of thirty-two cases of forcible rape showed that finger insertion was attempted by all these rapists and successfully achieved by 88 percent. It will be seen, then, that surreptitious and forcible rape have much in common culturally, both involving force and both being characterized by the insertion of the male assailant's fingers in the vagina of his victim, in imitation of the defloration of a taupou.

Many Samoans aver that the principal aim of a male who engages in either surreptitious or forcible rape is to obtain for himself a virgin wife. This view is supported by the accounts, in court records, of the behavior of rapists after deflowering a female. For example, in December 1960, immediately after an 18-year-old youth had overpowered a 15-year-old virgin by striking her on the solar plexus with his clenched fist and had then manually deflowered her, he held up his bloodstained fingers to his male companion and shouted elatedly, "This girl has fallen to

me!" He then added, "Now we shall live together as man and wife!" In another case, a youth of 20 who had manually raped a girl of 15 shouted at her mother, when she tried to rescue her daughter, to go away as the girl was now his wife.³⁹

An analysis of thirty-two cases of forcible rape and attempted rape, again mainly drawn from police records, showed that 60 percent of the victims were virgins. In the typical case of forcible rape a girl of from 15 to 19 is alone and away from the settled parts of her village when accosted by a male of from 19 to 23 years of age. Often he is known to the girl, and he believes her to be a virgin. When she tries to escape, her assailant commonly resorts to the culturally standardized stratagem of knocking her unconscious with a heavy punch to her solar plexus. After inserting one or two of his fingers into his victim's vagina, the rapist usually also attempts penile intromission, which is achieved in approximately 44 percent of cases.

Many of the forcible rapes that occur in Samoa are dealt with at the village level by a special judicial fono, with even heavier fines being imposed than in cases of surreptitious rape. A proportion of cases, however, are reported to the police, and it thus becomes possible, by reference to the police records of Western Samoa, to form an approximate estimate of the comparative incidence of forcible rape in Samoa.

In the United States in 1968 there were 30 reported rapes or attempted rapes per 100,000 females. In his *Rape: Offenders and Their Victims*, J. M. Macdonald presents rape rates from several other countries. Norway has less than one rape per 100,000 females per annum; England, three rapes; Poland, seven; Japan, twelve; and Turkey, fourteen rapes or attempted rapes per 100,000 females per annum. So, as Macdonald notes, the available statistics suggest that the United States has an unusually high rape rate. How then does the Samoan rate compare with that of the United States? In 1966, when the total population of Western Samoa was about 131,000, the number of forcible and attempted rapes reported to the police in Western Samoa was thirty-eight, which is equal to a rate of about sixty rapes per 100,000 females per annum, a rate twice as high as that of the United States and twenty times as high as that of

England. Further, if cases of surreptitious rape, or indecent assault, reported to the police be included, then the Western Samoan rate becomes approximately 160 rapes per 100,000 females per annum.⁴⁰ These figures, while only very approximate (for in Western Samoa a very considerable proportion of forcible and surreptitious rapes are, in fact, not reported to the police), do indicate that rape is unusually common in Samoa; the Samoan rape rate is certainly one of the highest to be found anywhere in the world.⁴¹

There is every indication that this high incidence of rape has long been characteristic of Samoan society. Cases are reported by the early missionaries, as by Pratt in 1845. The court records of American Samoa, which begin in 1900, note numerous cases of rape having been committed by Samoans during the first three decades of this century, and the jail statistics included in the exhibits attached to the hearings of the congressional commission on American Samoa of 1930 show that at the end of the 1920s rape was the third most common offense after assault and larceny, any male convicted of rape being liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding ten years and not less than two. Again, in Western Samoa during the years to which Mead's findings refer, cases of rape by Samoans were regularly reported in the *Samoa Times*.⁴²

Both surreptitious and forcible rape, it is important to emphasize, involve culturally transmitted male practices. In surreptitious rape the rapist's practice, or "trick," to use Fa'afuina Pula's term, is suddenly to insert his tautly extended index and middle fingers into his victim's vagina while she is asleep. In forcible rape it is the technique of knocking the victim unconscious by a heavy punch immediately over her solar plexus. Both of these practices are part of Samoan culture, and I have witnessed them being communicated by one individual to another within groups of Samoan males. Mead then was markedly at error in asserting as she did in 1938 that "the idea of forcible rape or of any sexual act to which both participants do not give themselves freely is completely foreign to the Samoan mind." Rather, as there is an abundance of evidence to demonstrate, both surreptitious and forcible rape have long been intrinsic to

the sexual mores of Samoan men and are major elements in their sexual behavior.⁴³

It should now be apparent that Samoa, where the cult of female virginity is probably carried to a greater extreme than in any other culture known to anthropology, was scarcely the place to situate a paradise of adolescent free love. How did Mead deal with the resounding enigma of a society which demanded that a girl should, in her own words, "be both receptive to the advances of many lovers and yet capable of showing the token of virginity at marriage"? The solution, according to Mead, was to place "the onus of virginity not on the whole young female population but on the *taupou*." Yet the enigma very much remains, for in functional terms what is this elaborate concern with ceremonial virginity doing in a culture in which "freedom of sexual experimentation by female adolescents" is, according to Mead, "expected"? The "onus of virginity" placed on a ceremonial virgin was, we know, extremely heavy, for as Mead's Samoan informants told her, should a *taupou* "prove not to be a virgin, her female relatives fell upon her and beat her with stones, disfiguring and sometimes fatally injuring the girl who had shamed their house."⁴⁴

This punishment of the *taupou* who turned out to be not a virgin, which had been accurately reported to Mead by her informants in Manu'a, and which is confirmed by Williams, D'Urville, Turner, Pritchard, Brencchley, Riemann, Brown, and other writers on early Samoa, was, despite this weight of evidence, considered by Mead to be "too severe for the Samoan ethos," and in 1930 she published an entirely new ethnographic account of the ceremonial defloration of a Samoan *taupou*. A *taupou*, who was required to submit to ceremonial defloration on the occasion of her marriage, but who had lost her virginity, was only punished, Mead stated, if she concealed this fact. "If she confessed to having lost her virginity," Mead continued, "the old woman cannily substituted a bowl of chicken's blood and the ceremony proceeded without anyone knowing of the family's shame," while "with true Samoan courtesy in compromise, the talking chief of the husband connived also at the deception."⁴⁵

This account, which Mead published in 1930 in *Social Organization of Manu'a*, betrays a complete ignorance of the function of ceremonial defloration in Samoa. As I have already indicated, ceremonial defloration is a social mechanism for making absolutely certain that a bridegroom of rank is taking to wife a female with whom no rival male could possibly have had sexual intercourse. The whole procedure is designed by an intensely rank-conscious society to avoid all possibility of a bridegroom of rank being shamed by a male rival who, if a bride's virginity were not publicly tested, might subsequently claim to have had prior sexual connection with her. It is thus entirely contrary to all expectation that a talking chief, being his chief's active supporter, would connive at having his chief's intended wife deceptively declared a virgin. When in 1967 I put this proposition to the chiefs of Manu'a, they indignantly rejected Mead's account, saying that if the supporters of a seeming *taupou* resorted to the unprincipled and highly insulting subterfuge of bringing chicken's blood to a ceremonial defloration they would at once be heavily attacked. They also denied that Mead could have been told of such a practice in Manu'a.

In this they were correct, for the account of ceremonial defloration that Mead incorporated in her monograph in 1930 had been obtained not from any inhabitant of Manu'a but from a Mrs. Phoebe Parkinson, whom she had met in New Britain in 1929, and who had, according to Mead, the "answer" for which she was seeking. A detailed account of what Mead was told by Phoebe Parkinson, whom she describes as possessing "singular gifts as a raconteur," is contained in Mead's article of 1960 "Weaver of the Border." As Mead reports her, Phoebe Parkinson declared, "If a girl is not a virgin she will tell her old women, and they will secretly bring the blood of a fowl or a pig and smear it on the *i'e sina*" (a kind of mat). This, as it stands, is a quite incredible tale, for in Samoa to associate anyone of rank with a pig is the heaviest of insults, and the use of pig's blood in substitution for that of a high-ranking *taupou* at her ceremonial defloration, being both insulting and sacrilegious, would at all costs be avoided.⁴⁶

Who was Phoebe Parkinson, who indulged in such ill-in-

formed gossip? At the time of Mead's meeting with her in New Britain in 1929, she was a 66-year-old widow. Her father, Jonas Coe, was born in New York in 1822 and settled in western Samoa in 1845. His daughter Phoebe was born in 1863 in Apia on the island of Upolu, where her father had built himself a large house, "all cut out and planned in San Francisco." Her mother was a Samoan whom Coe had abandoned. Soon after Phoebe's birth, however, he claimed her to bring her up strictly as a European, sending her to the Convent School in Apia where she was educated by French nuns and developed the wish to become a nun herself. Instead, at 16 years of age Phoebe Coe was married to Richard Parkinson, a German surveyor, and two years later she sailed with her husband and child from Samoa to New Britain, never to return. From her statements to Mead it is evident that Phoebe Parkinson's knowledge of the traditional culture of Samoa was essentially anecdotal, being mainly based I would suppose on the gossip of European settlers to whom she had listened when growing up in Apia. "Once," so she told Mead, she had "a real glimpse of Samoan life" when as a young girl she spent two weeks living in a Samoan village. Phoebe Parkinson was then in no sense a reliable informant on Samoan culture, and in particular not on ceremonial defloration in Manu'a, where she had never set foot.⁴⁷

It was, however, on no firmer foundation than the fables of Phoebe Parkinson that Mead based her apparently authoritative version of the deceptive form that ceremonial defloration took in Manu'a—the highest-ranking polity in all Samoa. And she did this, in a technical monograph on Manu'a, a social organization, without divulging that her information had come not from the people of Manu'a, whom she ought to have consulted on this crucially important issue, but from an old lady living in New Britain who possessed singular gifts as a raconteur. In subsequent years, moreover, Mead embroidered her version of 1930, going far beyond the outlandish tale she had been told by Mrs. Parkinson in 1929. In 1935 she described how in Samoa the defloration of a ceremonial virgin could be "gracefully faked," and in 1950 she published in her influential book *Male and Female* the quite baseless statement that in a Sa-

moan defloration ceremony "the blood of virginity could always be counterfeited," adding without a jot of substantive evidence that a taupou who had lost her virginity in premarital intercourse was in danger of being "beaten to death" not "for her frailty, but for her failure to make an adequate provision of chicken blood"—so completely misrepresenting the attitude of the dignified and punctilious Samoans toward one of their most sacrosanct traditional institutions. It is difficult to imagine a greater travesty than this of the fa'a Samoa.⁴⁸

teristics which make it a period dreaded by adults and perilous for young people in more complex—and often also, in more primitive—societies,” was “the age of maximum ease.” Thus human nature, within the “different social form” of Samoa, lacked “the conflicts which are so often characteristic of adolescence.” On the basis of this claim, as I have recounted in Chapter 5, Mead unequivocally asserted the sovereignty of culture over biology.¹

Is it in fact true, as Mead claimed, that the behavior of Samoan adolescents is untroubled and unstressed and lacks the conflicts that are so often characteristic of this period of development? As Herant Katchadourian notes, “research on ordinary adolescents has generally failed to substantiate claims of the inevitability and universality of adolescent stress.” Nonetheless, the findings of W. A. Lunden, M. R. Haskell and L. Yablonsky, and others have clearly shown that the years of adolescence are hazardous for many, with delinquency in the United States and elsewhere reaching a peak at about age 16. To what extent, then, is adolescent delinquency present in Samoa? In particular, what can be concluded about delinquency among Samoan female adolescents from the information Mead herself has provided?²

Mead discusses delinquency in *Coming of Age in Samoa* in the general context of deviance. For Benedict and Mead deviance was a concept derived directly from their theory of cultural determinism, the basic notion of which was of the “undifferentiated” raw material of human nature being “moulded into shape by its society.” One of the corollaries of this notion was that this molding process was sometimes ineffective, with the individual who “failed to receive the cultural imprint” becoming a “cultural misfit,” or deviant.³ These deviants from the cultural pattern of their society Benedict and Mead then relegated to a special category, as in the chapter of *Coming of Age in Samoa* entitled “The Girl in Conflict.” In this chapter, which is crucially important for her whole argument, Mead distinguishes between what she calls “deviants upwards” from the pattern of Samoan culture, and deviants “in a downward direction.” Upward deviants, she writes, are those who demand “a different or

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Adolescence

WE HAVE SEEN that the “picture of the whole social life of Samoa” that Mead presented as an ethnographic background to her main conclusion in *Coming of Age in Samoa* is, in numerous respects, fundamentally in error. What then of her assertions about adolescence in Samoa? Both Mead and Benedict fully recognized adolescence as a biological process. Benedict, for example, wrote of adolescence as being “by definition tied up with a universal biological fact in human development,” while for Mead the adolescent period was “the most striking instance” of “an innate pattern of growth.” In Samoa, however, according to Mead the “disruptive concomitants” inherent in adolescence had, because of the mild and easy social environment, been “successfully muted.” Adolescence among the Samoans, she claimed, being “peculiarly free of all those charac-

improved environment," and reject "the traditional choices." In this category she puts three girls, all of whom she lists as having had "no heterosexual experience." Lita, two months past menarche, who "wished to go to Tutuila and become a nurse or teacher"; Sona, three years past menarche, who was "overbearing in manner, arbitrary and tyrannous towards younger people, impudently deferential towards her elders," and who blatantly proclaimed "her pursuit of ends different from those approved by her fellows"; and Ana, aged 19, an intensely religious girl who was "convinced that she was too frail to bear children." All three of these girls, according to Mead, might, at any time, have come into real conflict with their society, but at the time of her inquiries they had not, and so remained deviants upwards, rather than deviants in a downward direction, or delinquents.⁴

A delinquent, Mead defined as an individual who is "maladjusted to the demands of her civilization, and who comes definitely into conflict with her group, not because she adheres to a different standard, but because she violates the group standards which are also her own." Of her sample of twenty-five adolescent girls, says Mead, two girls, Lola and Mala, had been delinquents for several years. Lola, aged 17, of Si'ufaga, was a quarrelsome, insubordinate, vituperative, and spiteful girl who had "continuously violated" the standards of her group. She "contested every point, objected to every request, shirked her work, fought her sisters, mocked her mother," had been expelled from residence in the pastor's house after a fight with another delinquent, and in a jealous rage had publicly accused a female rival of being a thief, so "setting the whole village by the ears." Mala, aged about 16, also of Si'ufaga, was insinuating and treacherous, as well as being a liar and a thief.⁵

In addition to these two girls of Si'ufaga, Mead also mentions under her "conception of delinquency" a girl of Faleasao, called Sala. Sala, three years past menarche, was a "stupid, unhandy, deceitful" girl who had been expelled from residence in the pastor's house for "sex offences." This expulsion, which is a serious matter in Samoan eyes, shows that Sala had also violated group standards, and that she too, in terms of Mead's definition, was a delinquent. Another girl of Faleasao whom Mead

discusses was Moana, 16 and a half, who, having begun her "amours" at 15, allowed her uncle, who had been asked by her parents "to adopt her and attempt to curb her waywardness," to avail himself "of her complacency." This sexual liaison, as Mead notes, was "in direct violation of the brother and sister taboo," Moana's uncle being young enough for her to call him brother. It was thus an instance of incest, a heinous offense, the perpetrators of which, according to Samoans, are liable to supernatural punishment. Thus Schultz recounts that when Mata'utia had sexual intercourse with his cousin Levalasi, he was attacked by a loathsome disease, while Levalasi gave birth to a clot of blood. Moana's incestuous liaison with her uncle resulted, Mead states, in a family feud. Moana's violation of one of the strictest prohibitions of Samoan society was thus unquestionably a delinquent act in terms of Mead's definition, although Mead inexplicably did not even class her as a deviant.⁶

It is evident, then, from Mead's own account that four of her twenty-five adolescent girls were delinquents. Further, from her descriptions of the actions of these four girls, it is apparent that instances of delinquent behavior by Lola and Moana occurred during Mead's brief sojourn in Manu'a from November 1925 to May 1926. If we assume, conservatively, on the basis of Mead's reports, that among the twenty-five adolescents she studied there was one delinquent act per annum, this is equivalent to a rate of forty such acts per thousand.

How does this rate compare with delinquency rates in other societies? Mead, as we have seen, defines a delinquent as one who violates the standards of her group. The examples she gives of delinquent behavior plainly caused considerable social disruption, setting a whole village by the ears in the case of Lola and resulting in a family feud in the case of Moana. They were, in other words, of a kind that would warrant their being considered by a juridicalfono. It thus is possible, though Mead did not attempt this, to compare the incidence of delinquent behavior in Samoa with that of Western countries, where delinquency, as Sandhu notes, is defined as "any act . . . which might be brought before court and adjudicated." Mead's twenty-five female adolescents, as she notes, ranged in age from 14 or 15 to 19 or 20. If

we assume an age range of 14 to 19, it becomes possible to make a comparison, on the basis of the rates given by D. J. West in *The Young Offender*, for indictable offenses by females per thousand of population of the same age, in England and Wales in 1965. In the age-group 14-19 the average rate per thousand was 4.00. In other words, the delinquency rate which seems likely to have been characteristic of Mead's Samoan female delinquents in 1925, was about ten times higher than that which existed among female adolescents in England and Wales in 1965.⁷

This comparison is obviously only approximate. It does, however, indicate that among the girls studied by Mead in 1925-1926 delinquency was in fact at quite a high level. Further, Mead's relegating of delinquents to a separate population of deviants, or "cultural misfits," to which her generalizations about Samoan adolescence supposedly do not apply, is revealed as a decidedly unscientific maneuver, for her four delinquents and three "upwards deviants," who, together, make up 28 percent of her sample of twenty-five female adolescents, are obviously every bit as much the product of the Samoan social environment as are the eighteen other adolescent girls who were, Mead tells us, untroubled and unstressed.

The conclusions about adolescence in Samoa to which Mead came in 1929 were based, as we have seen, on a few months' study of twenty-five girls. She had no compunction, however, in extending these conclusions, in later years, to male adolescents. Thus, in 1937 her statement that adolescence in Samoa was "the age of maximum ease" was applied to both males and females, and in 1950 she asserted that "the boy who would flee from too much pressure on his young manhood hardly exists in Samoa." These statements were made without specific investigation by Mead of Samoan male adolescents. As we have seen, the delinquency rate among Samoan female adolescents is, in comparative terms, high. It has long been known that delinquency in male adolescents is commonly four to five times higher than in females. In this respect Samoa is no different from other countries; the ratio of males to females among 932 adolescent first offenders in Western Samoa was five to one.

Mead's statements about Samoan male adolescents are, then, entirely unwarranted. As I shall presently show, Samoan delinquency rates for male adolescents are closely comparable to those of other countries.⁸

First, however, let me note that I have yet to meet a Samoan who agrees with Mead's assertion that adolescence in Samoan society is smooth, untroubled, and unstressed. Vaiao Ala'ilima, a graduate in the social sciences, who was born in Western Samoa and lived in American Samoa from the age of 12 onward, completely disagrees, as his wife Fay Calkins has recorded, that Samoan adolescence is not "a period of 'Storm and Drang.'" Aiono Fanaafi Le Tagalao, a graduate of the University of London, when in Australia in 1971 as Director of Education in Western Samoa, observed that although it had been claimed that the Samoan adolescent does not suffer the same stress and strains as an American girl, she knew that a Samoan girl, who showed her stress in different ways, did not go through "a less stormy adolescent period." And To'oa Salamasina Malietoa, who as principle of Papauta School in Western Samoa has extensive knowledge of Samoan adolescent girls, remarked to me in December 1967 that the lives of many of these girls are far from being untroubled and unstressed.⁹

These judgments from highly educated Samoans who possess direct personal knowledge of what it means to be an adolescent in Samoa are fully borne out by statements confided to my wife and me by adolescents, both male and female, whom we came to know particularly well. These adolescents would tell us of the tensions between themselves and their parents, and of their emotional distress during altercations with their families or when they were heavily dominated by someone in authority. One 17-year-old girl, for example, who wrote down for us in her own words the story of her life, described her feelings of intense resentment at being beaten by her mother, and her distress at what was often said to her, adding that her life and that of others like her was merely one of servitude.

These subjective statements are fully consistent with our observational data on adolescent behavior in Samoa. As I have noted, Samoan children continue to be physically punished well

into adolescence. In the course of my fieldwork I observed fifty-six individuals aged 19 and under being physically punished by a parent, older sibling, or other senior member of a family. Of these, seventeen, or 30 percent, were between the ages of 11 and 19. Again, in eight cases, drawn from police records, of prosecutions for excessive punishment, half of the victims were aged between 12 and 15.

From this and other evidence I have presented it is clearly evident that not a few Samoans, during adolescence, are subjected to psychological stress. This stress, as I have documented in Chapter 15, is evinced in musu states, and in severe cases in hysterical illnesses and suicides—the Samoan suicide rate for adolescents being, the evidence suggests, significantly higher than in some other countries.

As Katchadourian notes, the attainment of puberty is marked by steady and rapid improvement in physical strength, skill and endurance, and this development is also marked by the involvement of adolescents in aggressive encounters of various kinds. A sample of first offenders drawn at random from the police records of Western Samoa yielded 528 cases of acts of violence by males and 218 by females in the age range of 12 to 22 years. As shown in figure 2, there is a rapid rise in the incidence of acts of violence from about age 14 onward, with this incidence reaching a peak at age 16. Again, as is apparent from the cases discussed in Chapters 10 and 11, from early adolescence onward both males and females tend to join in affrays.¹⁰

There is also a peak at age 16 in offenses against authority, particularly by males. From early adolescence onward Samoan youths may be observed grimacing and making threatening gestures at their elders, including chiefs, behind their backs, especially after having been punished or reprimanded; with the attainment of puberty, youths will occasionally lose control and openly attack those in authority over them. For example, in April 1965 a 31-year-old chief, patrolling a village in Savai'i to enforce the ten P.M. curfew, came upon a group of five male adolescents who were breaking this curfew by playing a guitar and singing, and he at once set about chastising them with a board. Instead of scattering, as would children, at this show of chiefly

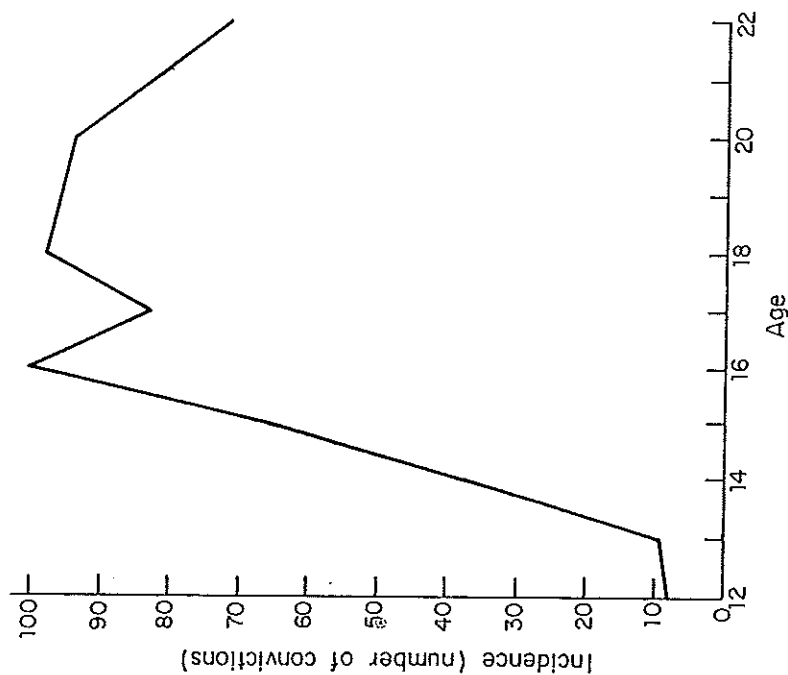


Figure 2. Crimes of violence: Age at first conviction (in the range of 12-22 years), Western Samoa, c. 1963-1965 (n = 746).

authority, one of these youths hurled a stone at the chief with such force as to expose the bone of his forehead and put him in hospital for a fortnight with concussion.¹¹

Another measure of the involvement of adolescents in aggressive activity is obtained from a sample of forty cases, drawn at random from police records, of convictions for using insulting or indecent words. In this sample sixteen, or 40 percent, of those convicted were aged between 14 and 19, with thirteen of these sixteen adolescents being girls. As these figures indicate, verbal aggression is very common among adolescent girls in Samoa, and gives rise to much fighting between them.

Samoan adolescents from about 14 years of age onward begin to become involved in stressful situations that are sexual in origin. In a sample of 2,180 male first offenders there were no convictions for sexual offenses by individuals younger than 14. There was, however, one case of indecent assault by a 14-year-old youth, and of the total of forty-five convictions for indecent assault, rape, and attempted rape, nineteen, or 42 percent, of the offenders were males aged between 14 and 19, an incidence comparable to that existing in the United States. Menachem Amir, for example, records that in the United States 40.3 percent of forcible rape offenders are aged between 15 and 19. In the case of victims of rape, however, there is an appreciable difference between the United States and Samoa. Whereas according to Amir only 24.9 percent of rape victims in the United States are in the age-group 15-19, in a sample of thirty-two cases of rape and attempted rape from Western Samoa, 62 percent of the victims were in this age-group. A statistic available from Australia suggests that the incidence of virgins among rape victims is appreciably higher in Samoa than in other cultures: while according to J. P. Bush 30.5 percent of rape victims in Victoria, Australia were virgins before they were assaulted, the incidence of virgins in my Samoan sample of rape victims was 60 percent.¹²

As these incidences indicate, the traditional sexual mores of their society subject Samoan girls, from puberty onward, to formidable stresses. Within their families, and as members of the Ekalesia (as the great majority of them are), they are subjected

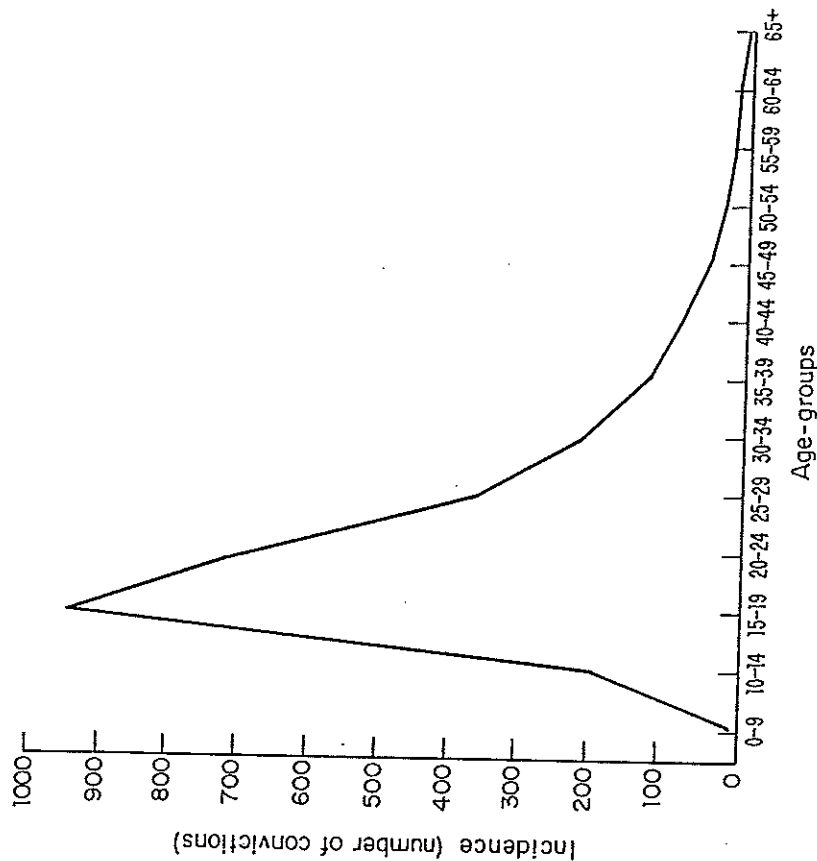


Figure 3. Age at first conviction, Western Samoa, c. 1963-1965 (n = 2717).

to a searching discipline aimed at safeguarding their virginity until a respectable marriage can be arranged—while during this same time they are exposed to the risk of both surreptitious and forcible rape. Thus, it is commonplace in Samoan villages for pubescent girls to be warned that they must sleep in the company of other girls of their family, so lessening the likelihood of becoming the victim of a moetotolo, and in particular that they must not walk alone beyond the precincts of a village for fear of being raped. Again, when a girl does finally elope from her family, as most do, from about 19 years of age onward, this occasion is commonly fraught with uncertainty and tension. These ordeals that the sexual mores of Samoa present to girls at puberty can generate very appreciable stresses, culminating from time to time in acts of suicide, as in the cases of Tupe and Malu (see Chapter 15) and of the 22-year-old girl (see Chapter 16) who took her own life after having lost her virginity to a moetotolo.

Now to return to the general discussion of delinquency among Samoan adolescents: as we have already seen, an analysis of the information that Mead herself provides on the behavior of Samoan girls aged 14–19 in Manu'a in the mid 1920s reveals what appears to have been a comparatively high rate of adolescent delinquency. In order to test further Mead's assertion that the adolescent period in Samoa in both males and females is untroubled and lacks the conflicts that tend to exist elsewhere, I decided, in 1967, to make a more detailed inquiry into the incidence of delinquency among adolescents in Western Samoa. At that time the only statistics available in Western Samoa on the incidence of criminal offenses were contained in the annual reports of the Police and Prisons Department, and these did not include information on the ages of offenders. A method that was open to me, however, was to compile, from police records, a *random* sample of convicted offenders, noting in each case the age and sex of the offender, the nature of the offense, and the date of conviction. The sample I compiled in this way totaled 2,717 convicted offenders. The offenses covered in this random sample included assault and various other crimes of violence; the "provoking of a breach of the peace"; theft and other offenses against property; trespass; rape and indecent as-

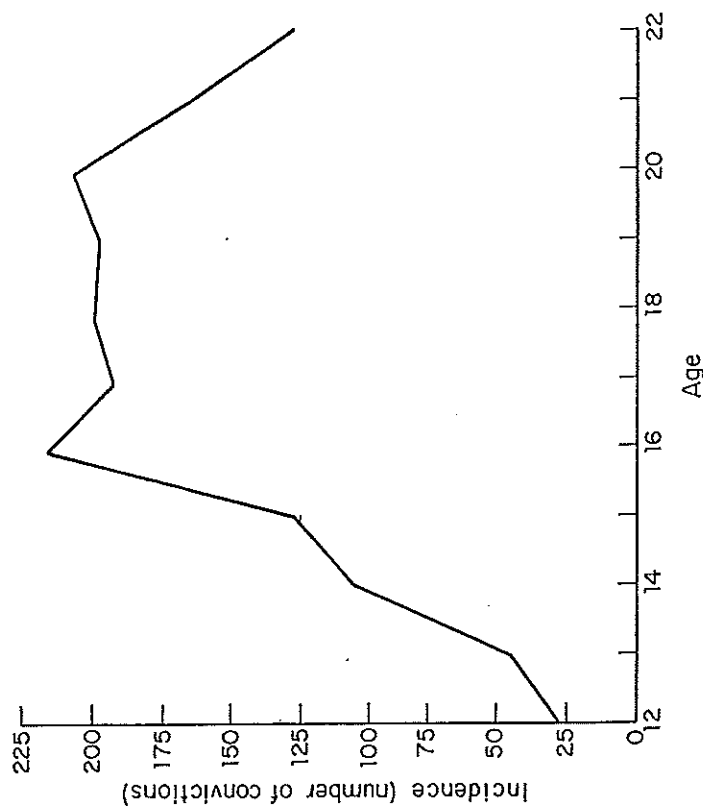


Figure 4. Age at first conviction (in the range of 12–22 years), Western Samoa, c. 1963–1965 (n = 1607).

sault; abduction; obstructing the police; uttering threatening, insulting, or indecent words; drunkenness; and perjury. In the great majority of cases they were offenses committed during the early 1960s, predominantly by inhabitants of the island of Upolu.

When this sample was tabulated in terms of age at first conviction the total range was from 9 to 80 years of age, and of the 2,717 offenders, 2,180 were males and 537 females, yielding a ratio of approximately four males to one female. However, of the 932 individuals whose age at first conviction was between 15 and 19, 777 were males and 155 females, a ratio of approximately five to one.

Figure 3 shows the relative incidence of age at first conviction for all 2,717 individuals of my random sample. It will be observed from this diagram that there is a marked increase, from age 14 onward, in the incidence of individuals committing offenses for the first time, with this incidence reaching a peak at the ages of from 15 to 19. A more detailed analysis (figure 4) of all the individuals in my sample who committed offenses for the first time between the ages of 12 and 22 also shows a sharp rise during early adolescence, a clear peak at age 16, and a high plateau through the remaining years of adolescence.

These incidences of age at first conviction among Samoan juveniles, while they are radically at odds with Mead's depiction of adolescence in Samoa, are closely in accord with findings from other countries. For example, Healy and Bronner's study of the Chicago Juvenile Court during the years 1909-1911 showed that the highest incidence among first offenders, both male and female, was of individuals 16 years of age. Adler, Cahn, and Stuart, in their study of juvenile delinquents in Berkeley, California, during the years 1928-1932, found that "the greatest percentage of the total number was found in the sixteen year age group." Bloch and Flynn, in 1956, gave 15 and a half years as the median age of delinquents in the United States. Haskell and Yablonsky, in discussing the crime statistics of the United States for 1972, record that "sixteen and seventeen year olds are arrested more frequently than persons of any other category." Challengier, in 1977, in discussing young offend-

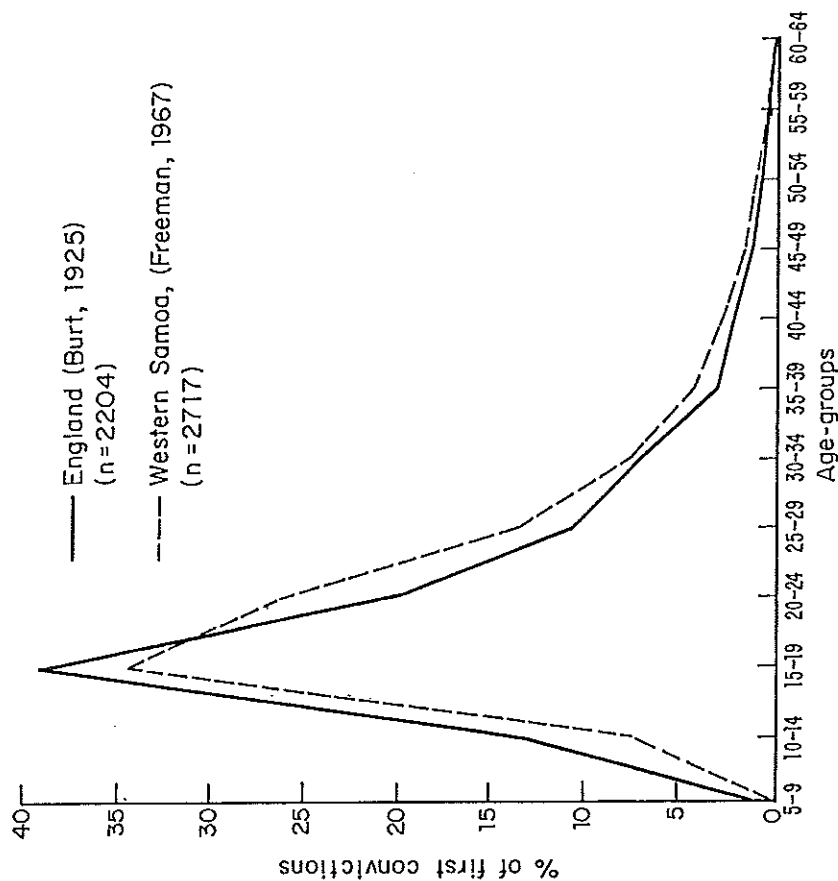


Figure 5. Age at first conviction: England and Western Samoa compared.

ers in Australia, notes that "sixteen year olds always comprise the largest single group of those appearing in court."¹³

Again, if a direct comparison is made, as in figure 5, between my data, compiled in 1967, on age at first conviction in Western Samoa, with data on age at first conviction of offenders in England, from Cyril Burt's *The Young Delinquent*, it is evident that delinquency during adolescence has a generally similar incidence in Samoa and England. A comparable similarity exists between Samoa and the United States. Lunden, in his study of persons arrested in the United States in 1963, reports that 38.4 percent were under 20 years of age at the time of their first arrest, while in my sample of 1967 from Western Samoa those under 20 years of age at the time of their first conviction made up 41.6 percent of the total.¹⁴

From these data it is clearly evident that the adolescent period in Samoa, far from being "untroubled" and "unstressed" and "the age of maximum ease" as Mead asserted, is in fact a period during which, as in the United States, England, and Australia, delinquency occurs more frequently than at any other stage of life. Again, as I have shown earlier in this chapter, there is substantial evidence from Mead's own reports to demonstrate that this was also the situation in Samoa in the mid 1920s. Mead, then, was at error in her depiction of the nature of adolescence in Samoa, just as she was, as has been demonstrated in Chapters 9 to 18, in her portrayal of other crucial aspects of Samoan life. This being so, her assertion in *Coming of Age in Samoa* of the absolute sovereignty of culture over biology, on the basis of these erroneous depictions, is clearly invalid, and her much bruted "negative instance" is seen to have been no negative instance at all. In other words, Mead's presentation of Samoa as proving the insignificance of biology in the etiology of adolescent behavior is revealed as a false case.

Mead's Misconstruing of Samoa

WHEN THEY WERE WORKING TOGETHER in 1927 on the characterization of Samoan culture, Mead and Benedict carried to its logical extreme their deeply felt belief that in human societies the traditional patterns of behavior set the mold into which the raw material of human nature flows. Thus, in *Social Organization of Manu'a*, in her discussion of dominant cultural attitudes, every detail of which had been "thrashed out" with Benedict, Mead wrote of the absolute determination of social pressure in shaping the individuals within its bounds. This notion that cultural determinism was absolute was "so obvious" to Mead that, as we have seen, she also avowed it in *Coming of Age in Samoa*, in respect of adolescent behavior.¹

That this doctrine of the absoluteness of cultural determinism should have seemed "so obvious" to Mead is understand-

able. Anthropology, when she began its study in 1922, was dominated by Boas' "compelling idea," as Leslie Spier has called it, of "the complete moulding of every human expression—inner thought and external behavior—by social conditioning," and by the time she left for Samoa in 1925 she had become a fervent devotee of the notion that human behavior could be explained in purely cultural terms. Further, although by the time of Mead's recruitment to its ranks cultural anthropology had achieved its independence, it had done so at the cost of becoming an ideology that, in an actively unscientific way, sought totally to exclude biology from the explanation of human behavior. Thus as Kroeber declared, "the important thing about anthropology is not the science but an attitude of mind"—an attitude of mind, that is, committed to the doctrine of culture as a superorganic entity which incessantly shapes human behavior, "conditioning all responses." It was of this attitude of mind that Mead became a leading proponent, with (as Marvin Harris has observed) her anthropological mission, set for her by Boas, being to defeat the notion of a "panhuman hereditary human nature." She pursued this objective by tirelessly stressing, in publication after publication, "the absence of maturational regularities."²

In her own account of this mission, Mead describes it as a battle which she and other Boasians had had to fight with the whole battery at their command, using the most fantastic and startling examples they could muster. It is thus evident that her writings during this period, about Samoa as about other South Seas cultures, had the explicit aim of confuting biological explanations of human behavior and vindicating the doctrines of the Boasian school. By 1939 this battle, according to Mead, had been won. In retrospect, however, it is evident that her eristic approach to anthropological inquiry, which had sprung from the feeble nature-nurture controversy of the 1920s, is fundamentally at variance with the methods and values of science, and there can be no doubt that Mead's fervent desire to demonstrate the validity of the doctrines she held in common with Benedict and Boas led her, in Samoa, to overlook evidence running counter to her beliefs, and to place far too ready a credence

in the notion that Manu'a could be put to anthropological use as a "negative instance."³

For Mead's readers in North America and elsewhere in the Western world, there could be no more plausible location for the idyllic society of which she wrote than in the South Seas, a region that since the days of Bougainville has figured in the fantasies of Europeans and Americans as a place of preternatural contentment and sensual delight. So, as Mead reports, her announcement in 1925 that she was going to Samoa caused the same breathless stir as if she had been "setting off for heaven." Indeed, there were many in the 1920s, according to Mead, who longed to go to the South Sea islands "to escape to a kind of divine nothingness in which life would be reduced to the simplest physical terms, to sunshine and the moving shadows of palm trees, to bronze-bodied girls and bronze-bodied boys, food for the asking, no work to do, no obligations to meet." Westerners with such yearnings readily succumb to the unfamiliar lushness of a tropical island, and there have been those who have described Samoa in tones of unconcealed rapture. Rupert Brooke, for example, who visited both American and Western Samoa in November 1913, wrote of experiencing there a "sheer beauty, so pure that it's difficult to breathe in it—like living in a Keats world, only . . . less syrupy." While the Samoans in this heaven on earth were "the loveliest people in the world, moving and running and dancing like gods and goddesses, very quietly and mysteriously, and utterly content," with "perfect manners and immense kindness."⁴

It was in comparably euphoric terms that Tahiti had been described to European readers after Bougainville's visit of 1768, as though the Isles of the Blest, of which Horace and Plutarch had written so alluringly, had materialized in the far away South Seas. The New Cythera, they were told, was an earthly paradise, with no other god but love, and with inhabitants who lived in peace among themselves, knowing neither hatred, quarrels, dissension, nor civil war, constituting "perhaps the happiest society which the world knows." This account is so strikingly similar to Mead's depiction of Samoa as to make it evident that in constructing her negative instance, she was, in

fundamental ways, influenced by the romantic vision that had possessed the imaginations of Westerners from the eighteenth century onward. The Samoans, she told her readers, among whom free love-making was the pastime *par excellence*, never hate enough to want to kill anyone and are "one of the most amiable, least contentious, and most peaceful peoples in the world."⁵

A romantically beguiling vision, like those of Bougainville and Brooke! Yet, as I have shown in Chapters 9 to 18, these and numerous other components of Mead's depiction of Samoa as a negative instance, on which she based her claims about Samoan adolescence and about the absolute sovereignty of nurture over nature, are fundamentally in error, so that her negative instance is no negative instance at all, and her conclusions are demonstrably invalid. How did the young Margaret Mead come so to misconstrue the ethos and ethnography of Samoa? The fervency of her belief in cultural determinism and her tendency to view the South Seas as an earthly paradise go some way in accounting for what happened, but manifestly more was involved.

The Ph.D. topic that Boas assigned to Mead was the comparative study of canoe-building, house-building, and tattooing in the Polynesian culture area. During 1924 she gathered information on these activities from the available literature on the Hawaiians, the Marquesans, the Maori, the Tahitians, and the Samoans. These doctoral studies did not have any direct relevance to the quite separate problem of adolescence in Samoa that Boas set her in 1925, and, indeed, the fact that her reading was mainly on Eastern rather than Western Polynesia concealed from her the marked extent to which the traditional culture and values of Samoa differ from those of Tahiti. Again, during the spring of 1925 she had little time for systematic preparation for her Samoan researches. Indeed, the counsel she received from Boas about these researches prior to her departure for Pago Pago lasted, she tells us, for only half an hour. During this brief meeting Boas' principal instruction was that she should concentrate on the problem he had set her and not waste time doing ethnography. Accordingly, when in the second week of November 1925 Mead reached Manu'a, she at once launched

into the study of adolescence without first acquiring, either by observation or from inquiry with adult informants, a thorough understanding of the traditional values and customs of the Manu'ans. This, without doubt, was an ill-advised way to proceed, for it meant that Mead was in no position to check the statements of the girls she was studying against a well-informed knowledge of the fa'aSamoa.⁶

It is also evident that Mead greatly underestimated the complexity of the culture, society, history, and psychology of the people among whom she was to study adolescence. Samoan society, so Mead would have it, is "very simple," and Samoan culture "uncomplex." In the introduction to *Coming of Age in Samoa* she tells us that while years of study are necessary before a student can begin to understand the forces at work within "complicated civilizations like those of Europe, or the higher civilizations of the East," a "primitive people" presents a much less elaborate problem, with a trained student being able to "master the fundamental structure of a primitive society in a few months."⁷

As any one who cares to consult Augustin Krämer's *Die Samoa-Inseln*, Robert Louis Stevenson's *A Footnote to History*, or J. W. Davidson's *Samoa mo Samoa* will quickly discover, Samoan society and culture are by no means simple and uncomplex; they are marked by particularities, intricacies, and subtleties quite as daunting as those which face students of Europe and Asia. Indeed, the fa'aSamoa is so sinuously complex that, as Stevenson's step-daughter, Isobel Strong, once remarked, "one may live long in Samoa without understanding the whys and wherefores." Mead, however, spent not even a few months on the systematic study of Manu'a before launching upon the study of adolescence immediately upon her arrival in Ta'u in accordance with Boas' instructions. Thus, she has noted that while on her later field trips she had "the more satisfactory task of learning the culture first and only afterwards working on a special problem," in Samoa this was "not necessary."⁸

For some ten weeks prior to her arrival in Manu'a, she had, it is true, been resident in the port of Pago Pago learning the vernacular, and had spent about ten days living with a Samoan

family in the village of Vaitogi. But this experience, while it did give her a useful initial orientation, did not amount to the systematic study of the fa'a Samoa that would have enabled her to assess adequately the statements of her adolescent informants on the sexual and other behavior of the Manu'ans. Another problem was that of being able to communicate adequately with the people she was to study. Mead had arrived in Pago Pago without any knowledge of the Samoan language, and although she at once began its study, the ten or so weeks she gave to this task before beginning her researches was far too brief a period for obtaining a fluent command of the formidable Samoan tongue, with its multiple vocabularies stemming from the distinctions of the traditional rank system. In this situation Mead was plainly at some hazard in pursuing her inquiries in Manu'a, for Samoans, when diverted by the stumbling efforts of outsiders to speak their demanding language, are inclined not to take them seriously.

Mead, then, began her inquiries with her girl informants with a far from perfect command of the vernacular, and without systematic prior investigation of Manu'an society and values. Added to this, she elected to live not in a Samoan household but with the handful of expatriate Americans who were the local representatives of the naval government of American Samoa, from which in 1925 many Manu'ans were radically disaffected. In his introduction of September 1931 to Reo Fortune's *Sorcerers of Dobu*, Bronislaw Malinowski expressed great satisfaction at Fortune's "ruthless avoidance" of both missionary compound and government station in his "determination to live right among the natives."⁹ Of the immense advantage that an ethnographer gains by living among the people whose values and behavior he is intent on understanding there can be not the slightest doubt. Mead, however, within six weeks of her arrival in Pago Pago, and before she had spent any time actually staying in a traditional household, had come to feel that the food she would have to eat would be too starchy, and the conditions of living she would have to endure too nerve-racking to make residence with a Samoan family bearable. In Ta'u, she told Boas, she would be able to live "in a white household" and yet

be in the midst of one of the villages from which she would be drawing her adolescent subjects. This arrangement to live not in a Samoan household but with the Holt family in their European-style house, which was also the location of the government radio station and medical dispensary, decisively determined the form her researches were to take.

According to Mead her residence in these government quarters furnished her with an absolutely essential neutral base from which she could study all of the individuals in the surrounding village while at the same time remaining "aloof from native feuds and lines of demarcation." Against this exigent advantage she was, however, depriving herself of the close contacts that speedily develop in Samoa between an ethnographer and the members of the extended family in which he or she lives. Such contacts are essential for the gaining of a thorough understanding of the Samoan language and, most important of all, for the independent verification, by the continuous observation of actual behavior, of the statements being derived from informants. Thus, by living with the Hols, Mead was trapping herself in a situation in which she was forced to rely not on observations of the behavior of Samoans as they lived their lives beyond the precincts of the government station on Ta'u, but on such hearsay information as she was able to extract from her adolescent subjects.¹⁰

That this was her situation is made clear in Mead's own account of her researches. Her living quarters, she records, were on the back verandah of the dispensary, from where she could look out across a small yard into part of the village of Lumā. This part of the government medical dispensary became her research headquarters, and soon the adolescent girls, and later the small girls whom she found she had also to study, came and filled her screen-room "day after day and night after night." When she began her researches in this artificial setting Mead was still only 23 years of age, and was smaller in stature than some of the girls she was studying. They treated her, she says, "as one of themselves."¹¹

It is evident then that although, as Mead records, she could "wander freely about the village or go on fishing trips or stop at

a house where a woman was weaving" when she was away from the dispensary, her account of adolescence in Samoa was, in the main, derived from the young informants who came to talk with her away from their homes in the villages of Lumā, Si'ufaga, and Faleasao. So, as Mead states, for these three villages, from which all her adolescent informants were drawn, she saw the life that went on "through the eyes" of the group of girls on the details of whose lives she was concentrating. This situation is of crucial significance for the assessment of Mead's researches in Manu'a, for we are clearly faced with the question of the extent to which the lens she fashioned from what she was being told by her adolescent informants and through which she saw Samoan life was a true and accurate lens.¹²

As I have documented in Chapters 9 to 18, many of the assertions appearing in Mead's depiction of Samoa are fundamentally in error, and some of them preposterously false. How are we to account for the presence of errors of this magnitude? Some Samoans who have read *Coming of Age in Samoa* react, as Shore reports, with anger and the insistence "that Mead lied." This, however, is an interpretation that I have no hesitation in dismissing. The succession of prefaces to *Coming of Age in Samoa* published by Mead in 1949, 1953, 1961, and 1973 indicate clearly, in my judgment, that she did give genuine credence to the view of Samoan life with which she returned to New York in 1926. Moreover, in the 1969 edition of *Social Organization of Manu'a* she freely conceded that there was a serious problem in reconciling the "contradictions" between her own depiction of Samoa and that contained in "other records of historical and contemporary behavior."¹³

In Mead's view there were but two possibilities: either there was in Manu'a at the time of her sojourn "a temporary felicitous relaxation" of the severe ethos reported by other ethnographers, or the vantage point of the young girl from which she "saw" Samoan society must, in some way, have been responsible. As I have documented in Chapter 8, the mid 1920s were in no way a period of felicitous relaxation in Manu'a, being rather a time of unusual tension during which the majority of Manu'ans, as adherents of the Mau, were in a state of disaffec-

tion from the naval government of American Samoa. We are thus left with Mead's second possibility, and with the problem of the way in which her depiction of Samoa might have been affected by the vantage point of the young girls on whose testimony she relied.¹⁴

Mead's depiction of Samoan culture, as I have shown, is marked by major errors, and her account of the sexual behavior of Samoans by a mind-boggling contradiction, for she asserts that the Samoans have a culture in which female virginity is very highly valued, with a virginity-testing ceremony being "theoretically observed at weddings of all ranks," while at the same time adolescence among females is regarded as a period "appropriate for love-making," with promiscuity before marriage being both permitted and "expected." And, indeed, she actually describes the Samoans as making the "demand" that a female should be "both receptive to the advances of many lovers and yet capable of showing the tokens of virginity at marriage." Something, it becomes plain at this juncture, is emphatically amiss, for surely no human population could be so cognitively disoriented as to conduct their lives in such a schizophrenic way. Nor are the Samoans remotely like this, for, as has been documented in Chapter 16, they are, in fact, a people who traditionally value virginity highly and so disapprove of premarital promiscuity as to exercise a strict surveillance over the comings and goings of adolescent girls. That these values and this regime were in force in Manu'a in the mid 1920s is, furthermore, clearly established by the testimony of the Manu'ans themselves who, when I discussed this period with those who well remembered it, confirmed that the fa'aSamoa in these matters was operative then as it was both before and after Mead's brief sojourn in Ta'u. What then can have been the source of Mead's erroneous statement that in Samoa there is great premarital freedom, with promiscuity before marriage among adolescent girls, being both permitted and expected?¹⁵

The explanation most consistently advanced by the Samoans themselves for the magnitude of the errors in her depiction of their culture and in particular of their sexual morality is, as Gerber has reported, "that Mead's informants must have

been telling lies in order to tease her." Those Samoans who offer this explanation, which I have heard in Manu'a as well as in other parts of Samoa, are referring to the behavior called *tau fa'ase'e*, to which Samoans are much prone. *Fa'ase'e* (literally "to cause to slip") means "to dupe," as in the example given by Milner, "*e fa'ase'e gofie le teine*, the girl is easily duped"; and the phrase *tau fa'ase'e* refers to the action of deliberately duping someone, a pastime that greatly appeals to the Samoans as a respite from the severities of their authoritarian society.¹⁶

Because of their strict morality, Samoans show a decided reluctance to discuss sexual matters with outsiders or those in authority, a reticence that is especially marked among female adolescents. Thus, Holmes reports that when he and his wife lived in Manu'a and Tutuila in 1954 "it was never possible to obtain details of sexual experience from unmarried informants, though several of these people were constant companions and part of the household." Further, as Lauifi Ili, Holmes's principal assistant, observes, when it comes to imparting information about sexual activities, Samoan girls are "very close-mouthed and ashamed." Yet it was precisely information of this kind that Mead, a liberated young American newly arrived from New York and resident in the government station at Ta'u, sought to extract from the adolescent girls she had been sent to study. And when she persisted in this unprecedented probing of a highly embarrassing topic, it is likely that these girls resorted, as Gerber's Samoan informants have averred, to *tau fa'ase'e*, regaling their inquisitor with counterfeit tales of casual love under the palm trees.¹⁷

This, then, is the explanation that Samoans give for the highly inaccurate portrayal of their sexual morality in Mead's writings. It is an explanation that accounts for how it was that this erroneous portrayal came to be made, as well as for Mead's sincere credence in the account she has given in *Coming of Age in Samoa*, for she was indeed reporting what she had been told by her adolescent informants. The Manu'ans emphasize, however, that the girls who, they claim, plied Mead with these counterfeit tales were only amusing themselves, and had no inkling that their tales would ever find their way into a book.

While we cannot, in the absence of detailed corroborative evidence, be sure about the truth of this Samoan claim that Mead was mischievously duped by her adolescent informants, we can be certain that she did return to New York in 1926 with tales running directly counter to all other ethnographic accounts of Samoa, from which she constructed her picture of Manu'a as a paradise of free love, and of Samoa as a negative instance, which, so she claimed, validated Boasian doctrine. It was this negative instance that she duly presented to Boas as the ideologically gratifying result of her inquiries in Manu'a.

For Mead, Franz Boas was a peerless intellectual leader who "saw the scientific task as one of probing into a problem now of language, now of physical type, now of art style—each a deep, sudden, intensive stab at some strategic point into an enormous, untapped and unknown mass of information." Boas continually warned his students, so Mead claims, against premature generalization, which was something he "feared like the plague." Again, in J. R. Swanton's judgment, Boas was "meticulously careful in weighing results and rigidly conservative in announcing conclusions"; while in Robert Lowie's estimation he was a scholar "concerned solely with ascertaining the truth," who controlled the ethnographic literature of the world "as well as anyone." It is pertinent then to take cognizance of Boas' response to the absolute generalization at which Mead had arrived after probing for a few months into adolescent behavior in Samoa. What can be said with certainty is that if Boas, as the instigator and supervisor of Mead's Samoan researches, had taken the elementary precaution of consulting the readily available ethnographic literature on Samoa, as, for example, the writings of Williams, Turner, Pritchard, Stuebel, and Krämer, he would have very quickly found accounts of the sexual and other behavior of the Samoans that are markedly at variance with Mead's picture of life in Manu'a; and further, that if he had done this in a thoroughgoing way, the need to check Mead's findings by an independent replication of her investigations in Samoa would have become unequivocally clear. However, when he read *Coming of Age in Samoa* in manuscript Boas voiced no doubts at all about the absoluteness of its general conclusion,

and later in an enthusiastic foreword he wrote of the "painstaking investigation" on which this extreme conclusion was based. He had from the outset, as Mead reports, believed that her work in Samoa would show that culture was "very important." The response of Benedict, Mead's other mentor at Columbia University, was equally uncritical, and a few years later in *Pat- terns of Culture* she used Mead's conclusions, as had Boas in 1928, as apparently clinching evidence for the doctrine of cultural determinism in which she, like Boas and Mead, so fervently believed.¹⁸

We are thus confronted in the case of Margaret Mead's Samoan researches with an instructive example of how, as evidence is sought to substantiate a cherished doctrine, the deeply held beliefs of those involved may lead them unwittingly into error. The danger of such an outcome is inherent, it would seem, in the very process of belief formation. Thus, P. D. MacLean has suggested that the limbic system of the human brain "has the capacity to generate strong affective feelings of conviction that we attach to our beliefs regardless of whether they are true or false." In science, as Albert Einstein once remarked, "conviction is a good mainspring, but a poor regulator." In the case of Mead's Samoan researches, certainly, there is the clearest evidence that it was her deeply convinced belief in the doctrine of extreme cultural determinism, for which she was prepared to fight with the whole battery at her command, that led her to construct an account of Samoa that appeared to substantiate this very doctrine. There is, however, conclusive empirical evidence to demonstrate that Samoa, in numerous respects, is not at all as Mead depicted it to be.¹⁹

A crucial issue that arises from this historic case for the discipline of anthropology, which has tended to accept the reports of ethnographers as entirely empirical statements, is the extent to which other ethnographic accounts may have been distorted by doctrinal convictions, as well as the methodological question of how such distortion can best be avoided. These are no small problems. I would merely comment that as we look back on Mead's Samoan researches we are able to appreciate anew the wisdom of Karl Popper's admonition that in both science and

Observe
Boas

scholarship it is, above all else, indefatigable rational criticism of our suppositions that is of decisive importance, for such criticism by "bringing out our mistakes . . . makes us understand the difficulties of the problem we are trying to solve," and so saves us from the allure of the "obvious truth" of received doctrine.²⁰