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**MARGARET  
MEAD  
AND  
SAMOA**

The Making and Unmaking  
of an Anthropological Myth

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Harvard University Press • Cambridge, Massachusetts  
and London, England 1983

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## Sexual Mores and Behavior

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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-

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."<sup>1</sup>

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'ū 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 Huarimaguadas 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."<sup>2</sup>

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

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 "excepted" 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.<sup>3</sup>

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

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.<sup>5</sup>

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.<sup>6</sup>

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 ali'i 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."<sup>7</sup>

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."<sup>8</sup>

The culminating point in the marriage of a taupou was her ceremonial defloration in public. The account that follows is based on sixteen cases taken from the literature and my own field notes. The earliest of these deflorations 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 defloration accomplished, the marriage was usually consummated forthwith, with the utmost decorum, in a screened-off part of a house.<sup>9</sup>

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."<sup>10</sup>

In the case of a high-ranking taupou, the defloration 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.<sup>11</sup>

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.<sup>12</sup>

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.<sup>13</sup>

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;  
Lilomaiava 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!<sup>14</sup>

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 *tama'ita'i*, or lady of excellence.<sup>15</sup>

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.<sup>16</sup>

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-*ai*a 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.<sup>17</sup>

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 Utu-  
sauva'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 Satunufono, 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.<sup>18</sup>

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

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.<sup>19</sup>

With the interdicting of public defloration 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

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.<sup>20</sup>

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 "lewdly and lasciviously cohabiting" with a woman while not being legally married to her.<sup>21</sup>

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.<sup>22</sup>

Age	Number of girls	Number of virgins	% 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.<sup>23</sup>

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 preposterously 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.<sup>24</sup>

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.<sup>25</sup> In many cases the defloration that precedes an *avaga* is the culmination of a seduction that the girl herself has actively encouraged. In other instances, the defloration 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.<sup>26</sup>

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.<sup>27</sup>

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."<sup>28</sup>

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.<sup>29</sup>

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."<sup>30</sup>

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 corms 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.<sup>31</sup>

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."<sup>32</sup>

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.<sup>33</sup>

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, *fuā*, 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."<sup>34</sup>

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."<sup>35</sup> 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 comer." Thus, as viewed by Mead, the custom of moetotolo involves no force, only deceit.<sup>36</sup>

This is a major misinterpretation. As anyone who has studied the phenomenology of rape will know, successful personation by a rapist is an extremely rare event, and, in none of the cases of surreptitious rape which I have investigated has personation 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'afouina 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'afouina Pula observes, a "trick" known to all Samoan youths. If the moetotolo is successful in his clandestine assault on her virginity, Fa'afouina 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."<sup>37</sup>

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 juridical fonu. 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 corms 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."<sup>38</sup>

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.<sup>39</sup>

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.<sup>40</sup> 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.<sup>41</sup>

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*.<sup>42</sup>

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'afouina 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.<sup>43</sup>

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."<sup>44</sup>

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, Brenchley, 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."<sup>45</sup>

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.<sup>46</sup>

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.<sup>47</sup>

It was, however, on no firmer foundation than the fible-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'an 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'aSamoa.<sup>48</sup>

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## Adolescence

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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-

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.<sup>1</sup>

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?<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> 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



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.<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup>

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, underhand, 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.<sup>6</sup>

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 juridical fono. 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.<sup>7</sup>

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.<sup>8</sup>

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 'Sturm 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.<sup>9</sup>

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 Katchadourin 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.<sup>10</sup>

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

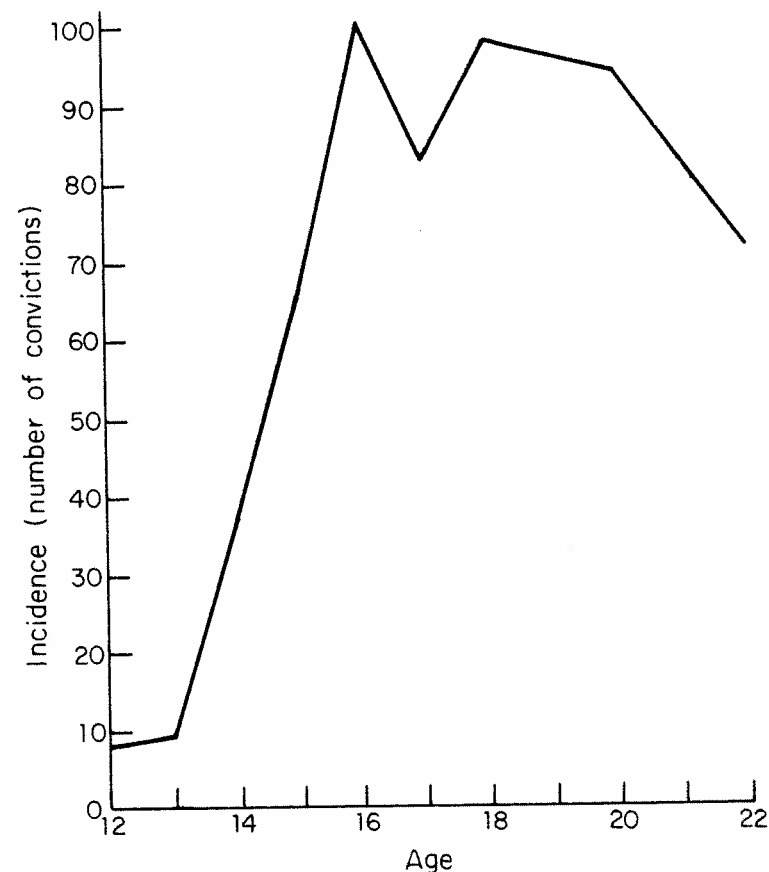


Figure 2. Crimes of violence: Age at first conviction (in the range of 12-22 years), Western Samoa, c. 1963-1965 (n = 746).

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.<sup>11</sup>

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.

Samoaan 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.<sup>12</sup>

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

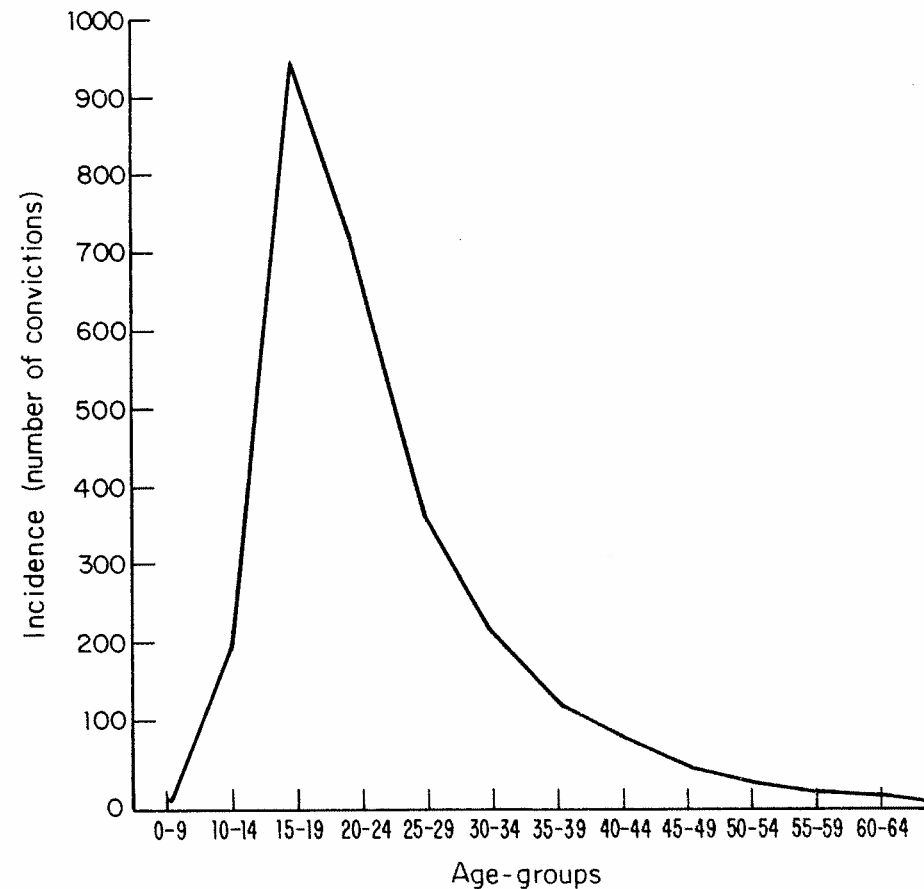


Figure 3. Age at first conviction, Western Samoa, c. 1963-1965 (n = 2717).

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-

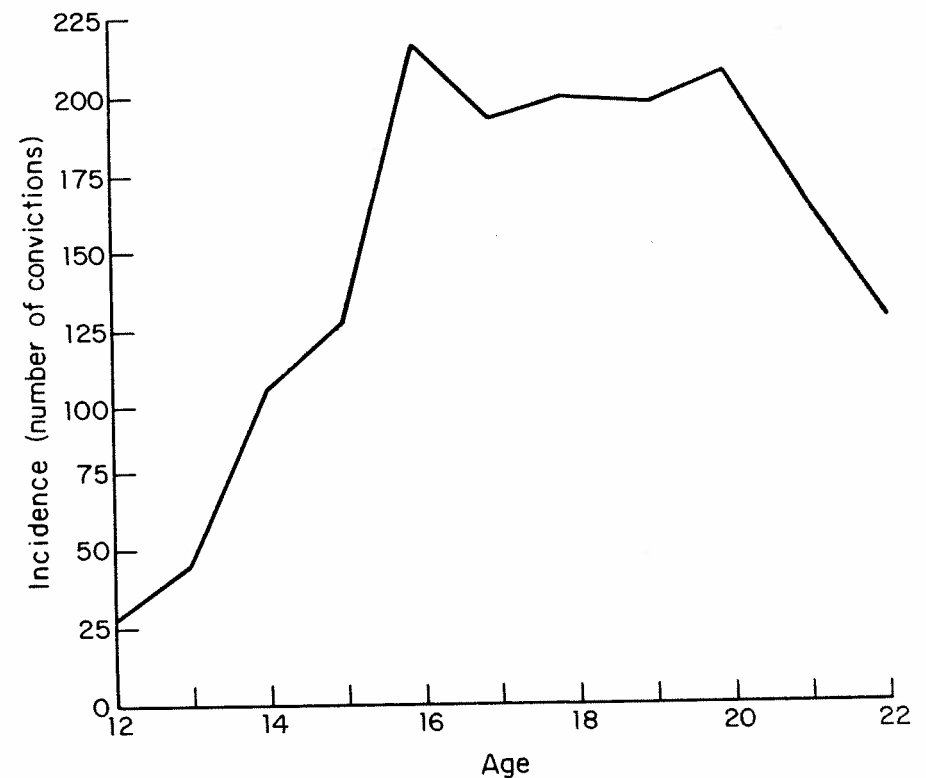


Figure 4. Age at first conviction (in the range of 12–22 years), Western Samoa, c. 1963–1965 (n = 1607).

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." Challinger, in 1977, in discussing young offend-

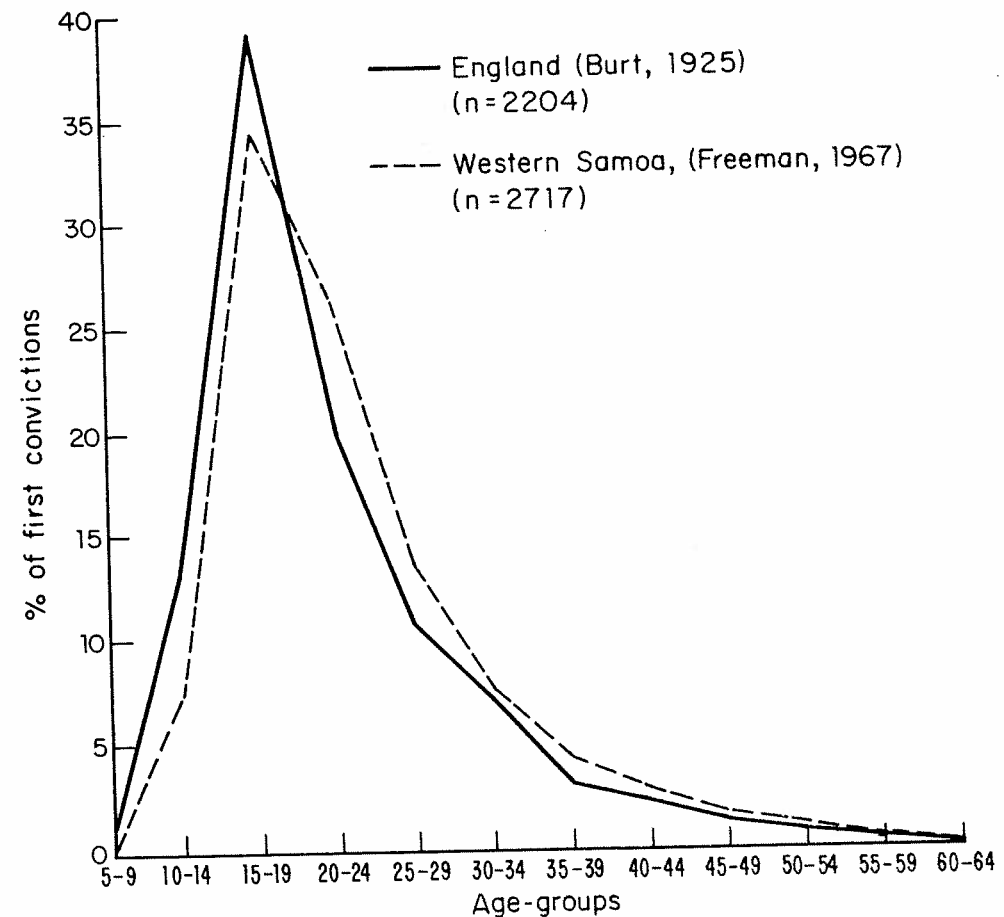


Figure 5. Age at first conviction: England and Western Samoa compared.

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

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.<sup>14</sup>

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 bruited "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.

## 18

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### The Samoan Ethos

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AS WE HAVE SEEN, the punishment traditionally meted out to an erring taupou was deemed by Mead to be "too severe for the Samoan ethos," which in all her writings she portrays as "mild," "relaxed" and "gentle." Thus, according to Mead, "The Samoan system is a very pleasant way of reducing the rough unseemly aspects of human nature to a pleasant innocuousness," and it "lacks intensity in every respect." "Strong allegiances" are "disallowed," and such is the "general casualness of the whole society," Mead asserts in *Coming of Age in Samoa*, that "no one suffers for his convictions, or fights to the death for special ends."<sup>1</sup>

It is to this last depiction that Samoans, and especially male Samoans, take particular exception, for, as they well know, it is a major misrepresentation of their ethos and history. When in