

---

Introduction to Special Issue

---

## The Mead–Freeman Controversy in Review

James E. Côté<sup>1</sup>

In 1928, Margaret Mead published *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilization* (hereafter CA) in which she argued that adolescents in 1920s Samoa experienced a transition to adulthood that was relatively stress-free in relation to Western societies. Her conclusion that the incidence and prevalence of adolescent storm and stress are affected by the social structuring of this age period was subsequently accepted in some circles, but has since been independently verified in several fields, including psychology, sociology, and anthropology (e.g., Arnett, 1999; Schlegel and Barry, 1991; Petersen, 1993; Rohner, 2000). In drawing these conclusions, Mead (e.g., 1928/1973, pp. 259–261) made a number of generalizations about Samoan culture and mores that she knew at the time were speculative. The accuracy and consistency of these speculations were of concern to a number of scholars over the years (as shown in the articles in this issue by Shankman, and Murray and Darnell), but have since become the object of great debate.

The heated controversy over Mead's research in Samoa began in the early 1980s with the publication of Freeman's book (Freeman, 1983), *Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth*, in which he argued that Mead was basically "wrong" about most of what she wrote about Samoan adolescence, in particular, and Samoan culture, in general. Subsequently, Freeman took his complaints about Mead's research to the public in a documentary film (Heimans, 1988) and in a play written about his life, titled *Heretic: Based on the Life of Derek Freeman* (see Williamson, 1996). Simultaneously, he pressed his case against Mead to academic colleagues in a number of journal articles (e.g., Freeman, 1989, 1991a, 1991b, 1992, 1997).

<sup>1</sup>Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada. Received Ph.D. in sociology from York University, Toronto, Canada. Research interests include the sociology of youth, changing nature of the life course, identity formation, and higher educational outcomes. To whom correspondence should be addressed at Department of Sociology, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada, N6A 5C2; e-mail: cote@julian.uwo.ca.

Most recently, Freeman (1999) published another book incorporating information he collected after publishing his first book. This second book, titled *The Fateful Hoaxing of Margaret Mead: A Historical Analysis of her Samoan Research*, is directed at both the general public and academics, and focuses on his assertion that Mead was duped by some informants regarding the prevalence of premarital sexual behavior in 1920s Samoa. It is specifically this issue—premarital sexual behavior—upon which Freeman (1999, p. 211) now focuses; he no longer gives the attention he once did to his claims regarding (1) Samoan adolescence, (2) specific features of Samoan culture, or (3) his attempted interactionist synthesis of the nature–nurture debate. Nor has he addressed book-length criticisms of these claims, except to make the sweeping dismissal that they were “written in the absence of adequate historical research, [and are therefore] radically misleading.”

Although a number of observers have expressed a weariness with it (e.g., Morton, 1996), and have raised questions about its importance (e.g., Seidman, 1994), the Mead–Freeman controversy has been cited as “the biggest debate in the social sciences for years” (Crocombe, 1989, p. 38) and is listed among the ten “liveliest disputes ever” in Hellman’s *Great Feuds in Science* (Hellman, 1998). Moreover, the controversy itself continues to raise public interest, especially given the Margaret Mead 2001 Centennial sponsored by The Institute for Intercultural Studies that Mead founded in 1944.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the National Geographic Channel’s International network has produced a more balanced remake of the documentary film *Margaret Mead and Samoa* (see Côté, 1994, for a critique of the original film produced by Heimans, 1988). At the same time, Freeman has maintained some support among the public, including the politically conservative Intercollegiate Studies Institute (Henrie, Myers, and Nelson, 1999), which recently gave CA first place among the fifty *worst* books of the twentieth century, and a Samoan chief who wrote a book condemning Mead for besmirching Samoan honor (Isaia, 1999).

Given this continuing interest, the authors of this issue have set out to characterize and review key aspects of this controversy in an attempt to put an end to those things for which a reasonable consensus can be reached, and to put in context those issues that are likely to remain matters of opinion easily influenced by ideological preconceptions.

### MEAD’S RESEARCH PROBLEM

Mead had a relatively straightforward research problem to address. She introduced it in the following manner in the introduction to CA (Mead, 1928/1973,

<sup>2</sup>For more information, visit <<http://www.Mead2001.org/>>.

p. 2, emphasis added):

a great mass of writing about adolescence is flooding the book shops; so the psychologist in America tried to account for the restlessness of youth. The result was works like that of Stanley Hall on "Adolescence," which ascribed to the period through which the children were passing, the causes of their conflict and distress. Adolescence was characterized as the period in which idealism flowered and rebellion against authority waxed strong, a period during which difficulties and conflicts were *absolutely inevitable*.

Scholars of adolescence will recognize Hall's recapitulation thesis, which postulates that ontogenesis recapitulates phylogenesis as a normal part of human development (hence it applies to *all people* regardless of their culture). Note that Hall claimed that adolescent storm and stress is universal because of human ontogenesis, and this is what made it culturally universal. Therefore, for Hall, its source did not lie in culture, but in individual genetic make-up. To refute these claims, investigators would have simply had to present evidence that "adolescent turmoil" was not universally experienced within a culture, as was eventually done by Offer (1969). However, the object of Mead's study was to undertake a comparative analysis of adolescence in Samoan culture, with an eye to seeing if, and how, it differed from American culture in terms of manifestations of emotional turmoil. Thus, Mead did not deny that many adolescents experienced difficulties; rather, she was interested in identifying the underlying social causes of these difficulties through an examination of 2 dramatically different environments.

Hall is most generally known as "the father of a scientific 'psychology of adolescence'" (Muuss, 1996, p. 1), for his "discovery" of adolescence as a unique stage of the life course, and was influential in psychology and psychiatry through McDougall, Gesell, Lewin, Sigmund Freud, (especially) Anna Freud, Peter Blos, and Erik Erikson. It is a matter for historians to debate just what influence Hall had outside these fields (Caton, 2000), but his influence in these fields was obviously strongest among those who favored evolutionary–biological views of human development, and his "views exerted a marked influence upon the study of adolescence for many years" (Rice, 1992, p. 71). Hall's theory of inevitable storm and stress is still influential today in some circles, especially among the public and journalists (Rice, 1992, p. 72). Its legacy includes circular stereotypes about "raging hormones" that supposedly turn teenagers into emotional wrecks, and that misbehavior among teens is a result of these raging hormones. Indeed, this has been one of the most enduring, and difficult to eradicate, stereotypes that the social sciences have produced (cf. Coleman, 1978). Petersen (1991, p. 500) characterizes Hall's influence in the field of adolescence as follows:

Hall's views of adolescence, which included the concept of storm and stress, had great influence on all writings about adolescence for the next 50 years or so. Hall, influenced by Darwin's concept of evolution, believed that development recapitulated evolution, with the developmental phase of adolescence recapitulating the period of emerging civilization. He generated particular controversy at the time with his view that physical development in adolescence was saltatory rather than continuous, and with his related view linking

saltatory physical change to psychological turmoil (i.e., storm and stress). Although his views prevailed, both ideas were strongly challenged by other prominent psychologists at that time (e.g., Hollingworth, 1928; Thorndike, 1904).

Using Hall's reputation as a springboard for her challenge, and his strong assertions about adolescence as a theoretical reference point, Mead investigated Hall's hypothesis that a tumultuous adolescence was a phase through which *all people in all cultures must pass* en route from childhood to adulthood. The title of her grant proposal to the National Research Council (NRC) was "A Study in Heredity and Environment Based on an Investigation of The Phenomena of Adolescence Among Primitive and Civilized Peoples." She planned "to provide data from a primitive culture which can be compared with observations made in our own civilization, in an attempt to throw light on the problem of which phenomena of adolescence are culturally and which are physiologically determined." She went on to state that she would study "the individual religious experience of the adolescent" along with "such problems as the sudden or gradual development of the manifestations of sex, the effects of inhibition of the sex impulse through various types of social pressure, the physiological manifestations of shame, and similar problems, all of which should be investigated from the point of view of the individual experience of the primitive adolescent." In the letters provided in the Appendix of this issue, readers will find reference to this "problem," and her progress in completing it.

In the conclusion of CA, Mead reasoned that because the biological processes of adolescence are the same among individuals in different cultures, her observation that adolescence is an easier one in Samoa than in the United States would mean that difficulties experienced by American adolescents must be attributed to characteristics found in American culture, but absent in Samoan culture. This judgment was stated as follows by Mead (1928/1973, pp. 197, 198):

If it is proved that adolescence is not necessarily a specially difficult period in a girl's life—and proved it is if I can find any society in which that is so—then what accounts for the presence of stress and storm in American adolescents? First, I may say quite simply that there must be something in the two civilizations to account for the difference. If the same process takes a different form in the two different environments, I cannot make any explanations in terms of the process, for it is the same in both cases. But the social environment is very different and it is to it that I must look for an explanation. What is there in Samoa which is absent in America, what is there in America which is absent in Samoa, which will account for the difference?

Readers will note from this passage that Mead was not claiming that there are no biological processes associated with adolescence, but rather that since the biological process is the same in both cultures, differences between cultures in the level of disturbances during adolescence must be due to some other factor, like how adolescence is socially structured.

Mead evaluated her research problem with a cross-sectional sample drawn from the teenaged girls in 3 neighboring villages on a remote island of Samoa, representing prepuberty ( $n = 11$ ), puberty ( $n = 14$ ), and postpuberty ( $n = 25$ ). In

observing and interviewing these girls, she noted that there were no major characterological or psychopathological differences among these 3 groups suggestive of storm and stress as described by Hall. In her words:

The adolescent girl in Samoa differed from her sister who had not reached puberty in one chief respect, that in the older girl certain bodily changes were present which were absent in the younger girl. There were no other great differences to set off the group passing through adolescence from the group which would become adolescent in two years or the group which had become adolescent two years before. (p. 196)

If storm and stress were ontogenetically inevitable and universal, symptoms described by Hall should have emerged with regularity as the girls experienced puberty, but Mead reported no differences. She concluded that because none of her Samoan informants showed signs of behavioral problems triggered by puberty, “adolescence is not necessarily a time of stress and strain, but . . . cultural conditions [can] make it so” (p. 234).

Mead (1928/1973, pp. 234, 235) argued that the difficulties affecting the American adolescent of 1920s America were caused by “conflicting standards and the belief that every individual should make his or her own choices, coupled with a feeling that choice is an important matter.” In contrast, she asserted (Mead, 1928/1973, p. 273) that in 1920s Samoa:

The growing child is faced by a smaller dilemma than that which confronts the American-born child of European parentage. The gap between parents and children is narrow and painless, showing few of the unfortunate aspects usually present in a period of transition. . . . essentially the children are still growing up in a homogeneous community with a uniform set of ideals and aspirations.

Noting that “the need for choice [is] the forerunner of conflict” (Mead, 1928/1973, p. 202), Mead predicted that the introduction of choice into the lives of Samoans coming of age was going to have dramatic implications. As I discovered in constructing a social history of youth in Samoa spanning the 150 years since sustained contact with the West (Côté, 1994, 1997), Mead appears to have been right on this point. She believed that the issue of choice had not yet affected most of her informants because there was still little exposure to many Western institutions. Even the pastor’s village boarding schools set up by the missionaries were apparently not yet affecting the world view of most of Mead’s young informants, and they were “likely to pass through the school essentially unchanged [in their] fundamental view of life” (Mead, 1928/1973, p. 170). In contrast, those “who left their village and spent several years in the boarding school under the tutelage of white teachers were enormously influenced” (Mead, 1928/1973, p. 170), largely in terms of aspiring to nontraditional adult identities based on a career as a nurse or a pastor’s wife. However, Mead (1928/1973, pp. 170, 171) saw an end to this relatively conflict-free situation:

while religion itself offered little field for conflict, the institutions promoted by religion might act as stimuli to new choices and when sufficiently reinforced by other conditions might produce a type of girl who deviated markedly from her companions. That the majority

of Samoan girls are still unaffected by these influences and pursue uncritically the traditional mode of life is simply a testimony to the resistance of the native culture, which in its present slightly Europeanized state, is replete with easy solutions for all conflicts [for these girls]; and to the apparent fact that adolescent girls in Samoa do not generate their own conflicts, but require a vigorous stimulus to produce them.

Mead believed that the general lack of choice was not experienced as oppressive or as a misfortune by most of her informants, except for the few who were “temperamentally” unsuited for such circumstances. Rather, she saw several mechanisms in Samoan culture that socialized the young to accept this situation and to *not* view it as negative. For example, she reported that *children* were “urged to learn, urged to behave, urged to work, but they [were] not urged to hasten in choices which they make themselves” (Mead, 1928/1973, p. 231), and *adolescents* were not “pressed to make momentous decisions which would spoil part of their fun in life” (Mead, 1928/1973, p. 232). In addition, by “the time she reaches puberty the Samoan girl has *learned to subordinate choice* in the selection of friends or lovers to an observance of certain categories” (Mead, 1928/1973, p. 210, emphasis added).

A chief factor that mitigated adolescent storm and stress among her informants, then, appears to have been a restriction of choices that simplified their worlds. She contrasted this to the U.S. by noting that a greater freedom of choice there did not necessarily lead to happiness and fulfilment. Mead argued that too much choice can be a source of conflict for the young, especially when there is little guidance in choice-making or when the choices are illusory. This sort of contribution of Mead’s study to the literature is lost with the overemphasis that has been placed on the sexual component of her book and the misperception that the purpose of Mead’s book was to describe a free-love society.

In contrast to the extensive attention that Freeman has given to the issue of sexuality, Mead cited sexual freedom as but one of several explanations of the culturally mitigated storm and stress she found in Samoa. In the chapter discussing her speculations about how Samoan culture differed from American culture, freedom of choice regarding sexuality was among the last features cited. From her correspondence with Boas, it appears that at first she thought that the girls under the pastor’s control would constitute a sort of control group for her in the sense that they would exhibit higher levels of storm and stress because of the restraints placed on them (about one third of her postpuberty sample was under this “European” influence living in boarding schools run by the village pastors). In her letter of November 29, 1925 (Appendix, this issue) she wrote: “The teachers report that they are or by far the most insubordinate in school, and surface contact shows them to be unusually self-conscious and salacious minded when compared with a group as a whole.” However, in the end, Mead (1928/1973, pp. 264, 265) could not conclude that this was the case:

The existence of the pastor’s boarding-school for girls past puberty provided me with a rough control group. These girls were so severely watched that heterosexual activities were impossible; . . . they lived a more ordered and regular life than the girls who remained in

households. The ways in which they differed from other girls of the same age and more resembled European girls of the same age follow with surprising accuracy the lines suggested by the specific differences in environment. However, as they lived part of the time at home, the environmental break was not complete and their value as a control group is strictly limited.

Thus, Mead's original hunch that she would find significant variation among her Samoan informants was not borne out, so she was left with a mixed social environment that marred the unity of her study, as she put it (Mead, 1928/1973, p. 259). As for the pastor's attitude toward chastity, Mead contended that a blind eye was turned toward the premarital sexual behavior of those not residing in the pastor's house, so long as it was discreet. The "passive acceptance . . . of premarital irregularities went a long way towards minimizing the girls' sense of guilt" (Mead, 1928/1973, p. 161) and it minimized emotional turmoil in their lives. In her March 14, 1926, letter she reported that parents attempted to preserve the virginity of their daughters, but that "this attempt is usually secretly frustrated rather than openly combated by the adolescent" (Appendix, this issue). With the community turning a blind eye to subsequent (discreet) activity, Mead believed that potential conflict was avoided in the relations between the young and the community. As Mead (1928/1973, pp. 163, 164) noted, the introduction of Christian values regarding sexuality could "have provided a real setting for conflict." However, as late as the 1920s, the pastors apparently were not enforcing those values, except among the young people who took up residence in the pastor's house. Had they imposed religious observance on the young, "crises in the lives of the young people would very likely have occurred" (Mead, 1928/1973, p. 164). Part of the difficulty with this controversy is that a distinction is not drawn between precontact Samoan culture and the current Christianized culture, which is referred to informally by some as the "bible belt of the South Pacific."

In spite of what Mead might have thought at the time, because the girls in the pastor's house did not exhibit significantly more difficulty in the transition through puberty, freedom of choice regarding sexual activity and/or sexual abstinence cannot be used as an explanation for variation in levels of storm and stress. In a sense, then, the current heated debate over the issue of premarital sexual activity is a moot point, and it is readily apparent that any weight Mead put on it as a factor mitigating storm and stress was one of her speculations that intelligent observers can set aside in their overall utilization of the contents of CA.

Mead's study could also have been more scientifically rigorous, especially by contemporary standards. Orans (1996) is highly critical of this aspect of Mead's study, but he missed the importance of Mead's cross-sectional design. Given her resources at the time, however, this design was a reasonable component of her study in that she looked for characterological differences among the 3 groups associated with puberty, which was thought to be the trigger for the symptomatology of storm and stress that Hall contended was universal. In addition, Orans correctly refers to knowledge of adolescent storm and stress at that time as "impressionistic."

Although Mead did not have a concrete operationalization of adolescent storm and stress (and there are still no empirical measures of this concept) it would have been difficult for her to miss it among her informants with the symptomatology described by Hall if she were looking specifically for it (and she did report in her letters spending a great deal of time with her informants). Hall (1904, p. 40) was quite clear in his designations of the symptoms of adolescent storm and stress. He defined storm and stress in terms of the *emotional instability* associated with swings between opposite feelings: "alternations between inertness and excitement, pleasure and pain, self-confidence and humility, selfishness and altruism, society and solitude, sensitiveness and dulness, knowing and doing, conservatism and iconoclasm, sense and intellect."

These scientific limitations of Mead's study are mitigated by the fact that Hall claimed that adolescent storm and stress is universal because of human ontogenesis, and this is what made it culturally universal. Mead took this as her reference point for the United States, which is why she did not repeat her data collection there: Hall's contentions were so strong as to provide a justification for not employing a comparison group from which to estimate a differential incidence of storm and stress. To refute Hall's claims, Mead simply had to present a case where it was not widely experienced. In the sample she presented, she actually reported no cases of behavioral disturbance that had their origin in puberty (above). However, she went further to speculate about the cultural conditions that were evoking the symptomatology that Hall had mistakenly attributed to human genetics. It is these speculations as they relate to Samoan culture that have been the focus of the controversy (see Côté, 2000b, for more about the reason for this speculation). Unfortunately, the emphasis on sex in the controversy has overshadowed the fact that Mead appears to have been right about finding low levels of difficulties associated with puberty, although some of her reasons seem to have been wrong.

The perfect scientific study to examine Mead's problem would have been to use validated and standardized quantitative tests or clinical assessments measuring the prevalence and severity of storm and stress symptomatology among representative longitudinal samples of American and Samoan adolescents (both male and female), controlling for factors like the relative age of onset of puberty and nutrition. Mead did not have the means to undertake such a study, and it has not been done to date.<sup>3</sup> Instead, she pioneered a cross-sectional method for studying adolescent development, with the onset of puberty as one criterion. Although we now know that the assumption from Hall regarding the prevalence of storm and stress in American society was wrong, and we can take exception to some of Mead's reasoning as to why Samoan adolescence was experienced in the way she reported, I have found little reason to doubt her actual behavioral descriptions

<sup>3</sup> Actually, Mead considered using the newly developed instrument that measured galvanic skin response, but she concluded that it was not suitable because it only measured gross emotional responses (Mead, 1972).

of the Samoan adolescents she studied (Côté, 1992, 1994, 1997), and I have had no difficulty separating her concrete observations of their lives from her abstract speculations about why their lives were that way (see Caton, 2000, for a different view of Mead's methodology).

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CONTROVERSY

The publication of Freeman's first book drew an unusual amount of attention for an academic treatment of a disagreement, including stories in major newspapers around the world, and discussions on the talk-show circuit (Holmes, 1983), where Freeman went head-to-head with several anthropologists who were sceptical about the extent of his claims. The main reason for the attention of the media and the concern of colleagues was the extremity of Freeman's claims about Mead and her work. Freeman asserted that "Mead's account of Samoan culture and character is fundamentally in error" (Freeman, 1983, p. xii). In diametric opposition to Mead's account, Freeman argued that Samoan culture has been anything but casual since before contact with the West; there is a continuing history of a high level of aggression and violence among Samoans; Samoans have always idealized premarital chastity, but also commonly engage in rape; Samoans are highly competitive and easily insulted; and adolescence has always been tumultuous there.

Freeman declared that his book provided "detailed empirical evidence which had 'the specific purpose of scientifically refuting the proposition that Samoa is a negative instance' of adolescent storm and stress because it showed 'that the depictions on which Mead based this assertion are, in varying degree, mistaken'" (Freeman, 1983, pp. xii, xiii). In fact, Freeman referred to Mead's conclusions regarding adolescence in Samoa as "preposterous" (Freeman, 1985, p. 910) and "egregious" (Freeman, 1987, p. 930). The literature reacting to these and other claims number hundreds of commentaries, including dozens of journal articles, reviews, rejoinders and letters, and several books (see Caton, 1990, for an edited compilation of these, and Côté, 1994, for a critical review).

The initial fanfare created by Freeman's 1983 book lasted several years. As the articles by Murray and Darnell, and Shankman (this issue) demonstrate, serious anthropological scholars had been aware of the limitations of Mead's book long before Freeman's critique, but few scholars aware of the issues concerning Samoan history, adolescence, or cultural anthropology endorsed Freeman's polemic about Mead, or his reconstruction of how she supposedly shaped twentieth century social anthropology and intellectual history with claims about cultural determinism.

Adopting what has proven to be an effective strategy in gaining support in certain circles, Freeman has exploited the criticism of academic experts by claiming victim status as a "heretic" who is ahead of his time (Freeman 1992; Williamson, 1996). For example, his original book was reissued in 1997 under the title *Margaret Mead and the Heretic*. Some have argued that the controversy has become more and

more about Freeman (Shankman, 1998), suggesting that the debate has reached its point of diminishing return (Orans, 1999). Nevertheless, the strategy of claiming victim status at the hands of a dogmatic anthropology community has generated considerable support from the public in general, and journalists in particular (see Shankman, 2000). While Freeman has gained a reputation among the public as a David standing up against the Goliath of cultural anthropology, Mead's public reputation has suffered proportionately (Hellman, 1998).

Coupled with Freeman's self-styling as an unfairly persecuted heretic was an announcement that he had "crucially important new evidence" that resolved the controversy (Freeman, 1989, p. 1017). What he referred to were statements made by Fa'apua'a Fa'amu, an elderly woman at the time who had been one of Mead's age-mate Samoan friends during her 1925–26 study (she was therefore not an actual informant from among Mead's adolescent sample). These statements have become the key issue in the controversy as it has continued into the 1990s. According to Freeman's reconstruction of events, Mead was hoaxed by Fa'apua'a (and her friend Fofoa) on one specific day near the end of her stay in Samoa. Freeman claims that conversations from that day led Mead to believe that she had discovered a free-love society where the community did not attempt to curb the sexual activity of its adolescents, and that CA "was based on entirely false information derived directly from her hoaxing on the island of Ofu on March 13, 1926" (Freeman, 1999, p. 202, emphasis added). Here is the essence of what Freeman (1999, p. 3) has published from hours of taped interviews with Fa'apua'a:

*Galea'i Poumele:* Fa'amu, was there a day, a night, or an evening when the woman [i.e., Margaret Mead] questioned you about what you did at nights, and did you ever joke about this?

*Fa'apua'a Fa'amu:* Yes she did; we said we were out at nights with boys; she failed to realize that we were just joking and must have been taken in by our pretences. Yes, she asked: "Where do you go?" And we replied, "We go out at nights!" "With whom?" she asked. Then your mother, Fofoa, and I would pinch one another and say: We spend the nights with boys, yes, with boys!" She must have taken it seriously but I was only joking. As you know, Samoan girls are terrific liars when it comes to joking. But Margaret accepted our trumped up stories as though they were true.

*Galea'i Poumele:* And the numerous times that she questioned you, were those the times the two of you continued to tell these untruths to Margaret Mead?

*Fa'apua'a:* Yes, we just fibbed and fibbed to her.

Freeman (1999) claims that these statements resolve the controversy in favor of his original argument. He now wants the public to believe not only that Mead was "wrong" about Samoa, as he argued in his first book, but that she was hoaxed by a couple of Samoans about the sexual behavior of Samoan adolescents. Moreover, he thinks that this purported hoaxing is of tremendous significance to the history of ideas, claiming that CA was *based on* this alleged hoaxing, and that it subsequently

had a profound influence on the way people throughout the twentieth century thought about human behavior, erroneously supporting a supposed “doctrine of cultural determinism.” Indeed, Freeman makes the dramatic claim that “a whole view of the human species was constructed out of the innocent lies of two young women. That one of the ruling ideologies of our age should have originated in this way is both comic-and frightening! All in all, or at least it seems to me, it is one of the more spectacular stories of the twentieth century” (Freeman, 1996, p. 4). Because of the potential significance of this contention, two articles in this special issue examine the issue of Mead’s position on cultural determinism and whether she and Franz Boas were *absolute* cultural determinists, as Freeman insists.

In his recent book, Freeman (1999, p. 14) believes he has uncovered “an extraordinary sequence of events” that “was virtually inevitable.” He laid out these events in his “fateful hoaxing theory,” as we can call it, in terms of how Mead’s alleged hoaxing “was fated in at least five interrelated ways.” He asserts that (1) Mead was a fervent believer “that human behavior is determined by cultural patterns”; (2) her Samoan study was in “a severe crisis” because she spent too much time doing ethnographic research and not investigating sexual behavior, so “she was forced” to seek what was in effect secondary data (the alleged hoaxing) “in the hope of finding a cultural pattern” that would please her project supervisor, Franz Boas; (3) she took with her to Samoa “the quite false perception . . . that she would find that premarital promiscuity was the ruling cultural pattern in Samoa”; (4) as a “dedicated follower” of Boas “she wanted, above all else, to reach a conclusion that would gratify him,” putting her in a tizzy when her research was not going well and leading her to suspend her own critical judgment; and (5) “it is customary for Samoans . . . to resort to joking behavior . . . when interrogated about sexual behavior” and Mead did not realize this (Freeman, 1999, pp. 14, 15). As a result of these circumstances, Freeman (1999, p. 146) charges that Mead never undertook a “systematic, first-hand investigation of the sexual behavior” of her adolescent informants, yet she concluded—Freeman says to please Franz Boas—that Samoa was a sexual paradise where adolescent storm and stress was absent and therefore biology did not affect behavior during adolescence.

A large part of the evidence Freeman cites is from the correspondence Boas and Mead exchanged in 1925 and 1926 concerning her field study in Samoa (some two dozen letters). In this special issue, we evaluate elements of Freeman’s case against Mead—especially the hoaxing theory—to the extent possible with those letters (Appendix, this issue) and with the historical record available in the academic literature. With the goal of determining the underlying facts of this case, each contributor to this issue has applied his or her disciplinary expertise to Freeman’s claims. Each author is among the best qualified in the world to evaluate the “five interrelated ways” in which Freeman claims Mead’s research was supposedly “fated.”

Paul Shankman, an anthropologist with field work experience in Samoa, examines Mead's position on evolutionary and biological influences on behavior over her career, as well as the impact of CA, in light of what Freeman has asserted about these matters. He also considers how Freeman has gained favor with the public via journalists.

Stephen Murray and Regna Darnell, both noted historians of anthropology, pick up on Shankman's analysis by examining Freeman's claims regarding the importance of Mead's Samoan research for the "Boasian paradigm." From this vantage point they review the reception of Mead's book in anthropology in terms of how much it was included in anthropology textbooks and how much it has been cited in the professional literature.

Following this placement of Mead's book in twentieth century anthropology, my article updates critiques concerning Freeman's hoaxing theory, and examines a new piece of evidence that Freeman interprets to be a "confession" by Mead that she was hoaxed. I also argue that, rather than being the result of a hoaxing, many of the controversial aspects of CA can be traced to her eagerness to publish and the activities of her publisher, William Morrow, who was anxious to make the book a bestseller.

Finally, Hiram Caton, a historical and political scientist with a special interest in evolutionary theory, provides an intellectual overview of the controversy by carefully examining a number of aspects of the controversy that reveal Freeman's "game plans" in using Mead as his foil, and Mead's "success formula" in gaining the public's attention. In so doing, Caton arrives at another explanation for the strong feelings about Mead's work, both positive and negative.

These contributions bring a variety of opinion and evidence to bear on the controversy. The authors do not agree on all points, and we have not attempted to arrive at a consensus on minor details. However, there is a consensus that Freeman's case against Mead is flawed in several fundamental ways, including how he has characterized Mead's views on evolution and her place in the "Boasian paradigm," as well as his popular claim that Mead was hoaxed into believing she had found a "free-love society." In addition, we concur that Freeman has gone to great lengths to create a sensational story that is out of proportion with historical reality.

Finally, an Appendix provides a number of the letters referred to in the articles in this issue exchanged between Mead and Boas during her study. Although Freeman provided some of these letters in his recent book, he failed to include several crucial ones. Giving readers access to these primary sources takes the controversy to a new level in the sense that everyone can immediately evaluate archival evidence that could previously be accessed only with considerable effort and expense. The complete set of letters, along with Mead's proposal and reports to the National Research Council, are available on the "Mead's correspondence website" at <<http://www.sscl.uwo.ca/sociology/mead/index.htm>>.

## REFERENCES

- Arnett, J. (1999). Adolescent storm and stress, reconsidered. *Am. Psychol.* 54: 317–326.
- Caton, H. (ed.) (1990). *The Samoa Reader: Anthropologists Take Stock*. University Press of America, Lanham, MD.
- Coleman, J. C. (1978). Current contradictions in adolescent theory. *J. Youth Adolesc.* 7: 1–11.
- Caton, H. (2000). The Mead/Freeman controversy is over: A retrospect. *J. Youth Adolesc.* 29: 587–605.
- Côté, J. (1992). Was Mead wrong about coming of age in Samoa? An analysis of the Mead/Freeman controversy for scholars of adolescence and human development. *J. Youth Adolesc.* 21: 499–527.
- Côté, J. (1994). *Adolescent Storm and Stress: An Evaluation of the Mead/Freeman Controversy*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Hillsdale, NJ.
- Côté, J. (1997). A social history of youth in Samoa: Religion, capitalism, and cultural disenfranchisement. *International J. Compar. Sociol.* 38: 217–234.
- Côté, J. (2000). Was *Coming of Age in Samoa* based on a “fateful hoaxing”? A close look at Freeman’s claim based on the Mead-Boas correspondence. *Curr. Anthropol.* in press.
- Crocombe, R. (1989). *The South Pacific: An Introduction* (5th Ed.). University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji.
- Freeman, D. (1983). *Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Freeman, D. (1985). A reply to Ember’s reflections on the Freeman-Mead controversy. *Am. Anthropol.* 87: 910–917.
- Freeman, D. (1987). Comment on Holmes’s quest for the real Samoa. *Am. Anthropol.* 89: 930–935.
- Freeman, D. (1989). Fa’apua’a Fa’amu and Margaret Mead. *Am. Anthropol.* 91: 1017–1022.
- Freeman, D. (1991a). On Franz Boas and the Samoan researches of Margaret Mead. *Canberra Anthropol.* 32(3): 322–330.
- Freeman, D. (1991b). There’s tricks i’ th’ world: An historical analysis of the Samoan researches of Margaret Mead. *Visual Anthropol. Rev.* 7: 103–128.
- Freeman, D. (1992). Paradigms in collision: The far-reaching controversy over the Samoan researches of Margaret Mead and its significance for the human sciences. *Academic Questions* Summer: 23–33.
- Freeman, D. (1996). Derek Freeman: Reflections of a heretic. *The Evolutionist*, <http://cpnss.lse.ac.uk/darwin/evo/freeman.htm>, 1–5.
- Freeman, D. (1997). Paradigms in collision: Margaret Mead’s mistake and what it has done to anthropology. *Skeptic* 5: 66–73.
- Freeman, D. (1999). *The Fateful Hoaxing of Margaret Mead: A Historical Analysis of Her Samoan Research*. Westview Press, Boulder, CO.
- Hall, G. S. (1904). *Adolescence*. Appleton, New York.
- Heimans, F. (1988). *Margaret Mead and Samoa*. Brighton Video, New York.
- Hellman, H. (1998). *Great Feuds in Science: Ten of the Liveliest Disputes Ever*. John Wiley & Sons, New York.
- Henrie, M. C., Myers, W. J. C., and Nelson, J. O. (1999). The fifty worst (and best) books of the century. *The Intercollegiate Rev.* 35: 3–33.
- Hollingworth, L.S. (1928). *The Psychology of the Adolescent*. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.
- Holmes, L. D. (1983). South seas squall: Derek Freeman’s long-nurtured, ill-natured attack on Margaret Mead. *The Sciences* 23: 14–18.
- Isaia, M. (1999). *Coming of Age in Anthropology: Margaret Mead and Paradise*. Universal Publishers: [www.upublish.com/books/isi.htm](http://www.upublish.com/books/isi.htm).
- Mead, M. (1972). *Blackberry Winter: My Earlier Years*. Morrow, New York.
- Mead, M. (1973/1928). *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilization*. Morrow Quill Paperbacks, New York.
- Morton, H. (1996). Adolescent storm and stress: An evaluation of the Mead-Freeman controversy [review]. *Oceania* 67: 166–167.
- Muuss, R. (1996). *Theories of Adolescence* (6th Ed.). McGraw-Hill, New York.
- Offer, D. (1969). *The Psychological World of the Teenager*. Basic Books, New York.

- Orans, M. (1996). *Not Even Wrong: Margaret Mead, Derek Freeman, and the Samoans*. Chandler and Sharp, Novato, CA.
- Orans, M. (1999). Mead misrepresented (Review of *The fateful hoaxing of Margaret Mead*). *Science* March 12: 1649–1650.
- Petersen, A. (1991). History of research on adolescence. In Lerner, R., Petersen, A. C., and Brooks-Gunn, J. (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Adolescence*. Garland, New York.
- Petersen, A. (1993). Creating adolescents: The role of context and process in developmental trajectories. *J. Res. Adolesc.* 3: 1–18.
- Rice, F. P. (1992). *The Adolescent: Development, Relationships, and Culture*. Allyn and Bacon, Boston.
- Rohner, R. (2000). Enculturative continuity and adolescent stress. *Am. Psychol.* 55: 278.
- Schlegel, A., and Barry, H. (1991). *Adolescence: An Anthropological Inquiry*. Free Press, New York.
- Seidman, S. (1994). *The Postmodern Turn: New Perspectives on Social Theory*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Shankman, P. (1998). Margaret Mead, Derek Freeman, and the issue of evolution. *Skeptical Inquirer* 22: 35–39.
- Thorndike, E. L. (1904). The newest psychology. *Educ. Rev.* 28: 217–227.
- Williamson, D. (1996). *Heretic: Based on the Life of Derek Freeman*. Penguin Books, Melbourne.