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# Understanding the Discourse of Early Childhood Education in *Coming of Age in Samoa*

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**Abstract**

The apparently readily comprehensible descriptive discourse in Margaret Mead's famous ethnographic study *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) (CAS) presents a discursive challenge that is greater than one might expect from a book that has gained a wide readership. Through theoretical analysis, and in relation to the notorious Mead/Freeman controversy, we seek to contribute to understanding CAS as discourse, and even more specifically as *educational discourse*. Three research questions are addressed: How can the account of Samoan culture presented by Mead in CAS be understood as discourse? How can her account of *early childhood education* be understood in relation to Freeman's account? Is Mead describing *permissive education* when describing patterns of early childhood education in Samoa? We argue that Mead produced an overlapping research discourse that has appealed to the wider public because of its cultural suppressed message aimed at the unconscious in culture. Mead's and Freeman's contradictory accounts of Samoan cultural patterns in relation to *early childhood education* can be explained by differences in the perspectives of the social and hierarchical positions of respectable elders and chiefs (Freeman) and of young girls who were caregivers of even younger children (Mead). Finally, we argue that *early childhood education* in Samoa at that time was clearly *not* permissive. Young Samoan girls internalized the symbolic Law (Lacan) and were therefore able to act in an authoritative way as caregivers. In the field of education nearly a century later, Mead's descriptions of *early childhood education* in Samoa still provide an intricate case study.

**Keywords**

discourse, Margaret Mead, early childhood education, the unconscious in culture, authority

## Introduction

In her celebrated anthropological study *Coming of Age in Samoa* (CAS; Mead, 1928), "one of the most influential anthropological works of the twentieth century" (Stocking, 1989), Margaret Mead analyzed the way young girls grew up in Samoa in the mid-1920s and, within this context, the cultural patterns of early childhood education. With this "famous apprentice book" (Kuper, 1989), she embarked on a career that established her as "a symbol for the women's movement" (Strikwerda, 1991, p. 299). From the 1980s until recently, Mead's anthropological study has, particularly thanks to the notorious critique by Derek Freeman (Freeman, 1983, 1999), been the subject of extensive discussion both among the broader public and in American anthropology and philosophy of science (Abubakar, 2018; Côté & Freeman, 2000; Freeman et al., 2014; Holmes, 1987; Jarvie, 2013, 2017; Levy, 1984; Mageo, 1988; Rappaport, 1986; Shankman, 2006, 2009; Va'a, 2008). In the decade of debates that followed the first Freeman critics (1983), in which he challenged the findings of Mead's ethnographic study of cultural patterns in Samoa and questioned the scientific value of CAS, the Mead/Freeman controversy gave rise to a number of discussions that, in short, revealed some of the shortcomings of Mead's study while exposing the unconvincing nature of Freeman's theses. It is sufficient to quote Lowell Holmes, who, in 1954, completed a "methodological restudy" of Mead's work in Ta'u, concluding that, despite some deficiencies, "the reliability of Mead's account is remarkably high" (Holmes, 1987, p. 314).

With his criticism, Freeman in fact unwittingly encouraged numerous interpretations of CAS that would not otherwise have emerged, but that are indispensable for a contemporary reflective understanding of Mead's study. However, as far as we can determine from the available

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sources, the interpretations to date have not highlighted how understanding the *discourse* in CAS requires a knowledge not only of anthropological theories and insights but also of linguistic, educational, and other theories or concepts. Nor have they identified how the intercultural, overlapping discourse of CAS contributes to its scientific originality.

In his assessment of the Mead/Freeman controversy, published in the journal *Nature*, Kuper (1989) points out that Mead triggered a questioning of anthropology regarding "ethnographic fieldwork and writing" (p. 454), which is Mead's characteristic method of research. Freeman claimed that he could refute Mead by opposing "his observations to hers" (Kuper, 1989, p. 455); however, this is a fundamental methodological and discursive error of his critique. Factual claims are always *interpretations* of facts, as their meaning emerges only within a certain discursive, symbolic network. In relation to observation in ethnographic fieldwork and writing, this means, as Kuper (1989) puts it, that "no observation is neutral; no observer can free him or herself from constraints imposed by culture, status and life history" (p. 455). Moreover, any research (not only observation) is also dependent on scientific theories and concepts that enable questions and understanding, as well as the possible explicit or hidden assumptions of the research. Therefore, scientific enquiry, and ethnographic enquiry in particular, is a process that includes the "observer and writer" (as a research agency, his or her research object, questions, theories, specific research methods, specific knowledge and culture, etc.) and the "community of others" (experts and natives), who are indispensable for approaching truth and understanding. This does not mean that ethnography is caught in a vicious circle of total relativity and endless debate. There is an "authority in ethnography, *one which is not necessarily embodied in any one account*, but which is emergent in the process of expert research, comparison, evaluation and debate" (Kuper, 1989, p. 455; author's emphasis).

As we approach the centenary of the publication of a book that has "enjoyed substantial classroom adoption for decades" (Rappaport, 1986, p. 324), and in view of Freeman's criticism—which was intended to undermine Mead's status—and the subsequent debates, the question arises as to whether the text still justifies treatment in university courses today. We believe that, in the contemporary world, the text still provides an intriguing starting point for study at the intersection of *cultural anthropology and education* precisely because it requires interpretation. Our thesis is that these debates—albeit after the author's death, decades after the publication of the book, and often contrary to the intentions of the criticism and responses—have revealed that the text, despite its shortcomings, is discursively complex and challenging for interpretation. The challenge of understanding the open questions in CAS is greater than one might expect from discourse in a book that has gained a wide readership. With the present contribution to existing interpretations, we seek to contribute to understanding CAS in general *as discourse*, and more specifically as *educational* discourse.

## Theoretical Background and Research Questions

Based on the example of the *description* of early childhood education in Mead's ethnographic study, our aim is to demonstrate why and how the apparently readily comprehensible descriptive discourse of CAS presents a discursive challenge. However, CAS is a study of growing up and therefore also requires the introduction of educational theories and concepts. To understand questions of education, anthropology needs to employ educational theories for understanding *descriptions* of human symbolic reality, that is, cultural patterns of education and how these patterns, as a symbolic reality, have an influence (through interpersonal relationships and education) on the formation of the personality of children and adolescents.

In addition to various authors and texts from the field of cultural anthropology, the present theoretical study therefore has two additional conceptual backgrounds: in the discourse analysis of CAS, we primarily follow the psychoanalytical theory of Freud and his French successor Lacan, according to which the structure of personality in a human being is formed with the entry to language through discourse or, in the terminology of cultural anthropology, through patterns of culture. Lacan followed the assumption of Freud's theory that the human personality is divided into the conscious and the unconscious with the thesis that the unconsciousness—*unconscious* thinking, comprehension, feeling, perception, emotions, and so on—is formed through *the Other* as discourse (Lacan, 1966). The division between the permitted and the prohibited, between the external and the internal, that functions *within* discourse is the sociocultural foundation of individual unconsciousness. In our interpretation of the cultural patterns of education in CAS, we also use the educational theories developed by Baumrind (Baumrind, 1966, 1967, 1971) and others (Bernstein, 2013; Dusi, 2012; Maccoby, 1992; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Parke & Buriel, 2006; Paulson et al., 1998; Pellerin, 2005), in which educational behaviors and types of authority are correlated with specific personality structures.

Anthropological debates tackling the Mead/Freeman controversy have mainly highlighted various questions from the point of view of the "truth of ethnographic facts" and the scientific nature of ethnographic research methodology. Our research contributes to these discussions with an interpretation of the discourse that Mead employs in CAS, and our first research question concerns how we can understand Mead's account of Samoan culture in CAS as a whole *as discourse*.

The second and the third research questions are posed specifically from the perspective of education, the philosophy of education, and educational theories. In describing early childhood education of the time in Samoa, Mead

assumes that she is describing early childhood education that is less violent, less demanding, less repressive, and more casual than education in Western societies at the same time. Mead's descriptive discourse describing early childhood education in Samoa in the mid-1920s and Freeman's apparently contradictory observations refer to education; however, they are not "merely" descriptions, but accounts of the patterns of education in Samoa. We want to show that understanding both "descriptive discourse" (Mead) and "observations" (Freeman) as discursive facts and perspectives requires educational theories and concepts that make it possible to better understand ethnographic content about a specific past. Therefore, the second research question concerns how to understand Mead's account of early childhood education in relation to Freeman's account, specifically in relation to authority in education.

The distant past sometimes enables a better understanding of the cultural patterns of contemporary society. As it turns out, today, almost a hundred years later, educational issues are relevant from the opposite perspective to which they were probably viewed by Mead. Not in relation to the Freeman's critique but in the perspective of cultural patterns of permissive education in our contemporary societies, we pose the third question: When describing patterns of early childhood education in Samoa, is Mead describing patterns of *permissive education*?

## Findings With Discussion

### *Understanding Mead's Account of the Culture in Samoa in CAS as Discourse*

Anthropologists and the wider (American) public would agree that the main lines of CAS were familiar to generations of readers, including millions of students in the United States (Kuper, 1989). Why has *this* study—and not, for instance, Mead's sober ethnography of Samoa, *Social Organization of Manu'a* (Mead, 1930/1969)—resonated so much and so long among the American public? In a very insightful defense of CAS, Rappaport (1986) pointed out that as science CAS is "not so much incorrect as thin and in need of enrichment, it did make a modest contribution to Samoan ethnography" (p. 347). Rappaport (1986) locates the true significance of CAS in how it both supported and coincided with the American mythos, evoking alternatives in the cultural imagination, and, as such a myth, he suggests it served Americans well insofar as its messages are "humane and liberating" (p. 347). However, Strikwerda rightly points out that the separation of the factual from the mythical and the separation of the discourse of CAS (with its relation to the American mythos) from the discipline of anthropology as scientific discourse are dubious. No facts can be regarded "simply as 'observable state of affairs'; also facts are 'substantiated or proven claims'" (Strikwerda, 1991, p. 301). Furthermore, the implication that "this myth works at the level of American culture, independent of the discipline of anthropology" "is unpersuasive" (Strikwerda, 1991, p. 301). We concur that any "separation" of CAS from either science or anthropology is not a pertinent "solution" of the Mead/Freeman controversy. On the contrary, such a defense of CAS exposes an even greater demand for close reading and interpretation in relation to CAS as discourse that pertains to scientific truth. Strikwerda (1991) maintains that "insofar as anthropologists used CAS and other of Mead's books in their intro courses, because as Goodenough claims, 'They turned students on', they are implicated in the controversy" and in "a lack of responsibility for one's student audience" (p. 302). It is precisely the question of what it is in the discourse of CAS that "turns students on" that requires closer interpretation.

Rappaport defended CAS as capable of referring to *an American myth* and of generating new, different, alternative mythical messages, meaning that, "as a myth," it carries the truth within itself. However, even if CAS did produce mythical understanding and effects, the discourse itself is not mythical discourse; it is scientific ethnography, with discourse that is largely on the level of descriptions, describing patterns of culture, including patterns of early childhood education. Needless to say, interpretation requires an understanding of the theoretical backgrounds of the study (i.e., the cultural anthropology of Boas, Benedict, etc.; the universalist psychological claim of that era regarding adolescence as a period of storm and stress; Freudian psychoanalytic concepts), as well as educational theories that enable an understanding of authority in education, and so on. However, if the discourse of CAS does have the potential to appeal to a naïve reader, it is precisely its *descriptive* parts that require attention and reflection (more than her explanations of the findings). The interpretative problem of CAS and understanding its discourse require exposing the cultural assumptions that work "behind" Mead's description of behavior in Samoa, for instance, her description of Samoan "early childhood education," of Samoan "formal sex relations," and so on.

In general, Rappaport and many others (Errington & Gewertz, 1987; Marcus & Fischer, 1986) have pointed out these cultural assumptions of Mead. As he writes, Mead's ethnographic chapters offered an account of a society in which childhood and adolescence were much easier for most people, a society with more permissive conventions of sex and more egalitarian relations between men and women (Rappaport, 1986, p. 323). The social conventions of Mead's contemporary Western societies form the background of the discourse of CAS, and it is through the depiction of such differences that Mead offered an alternative vision of society. Indeed, CAS does not propose an alternative directly; it "only" describes different social patterns of a different culture. Besides, its "mythical lesson" in relation to change in society is anti-mythical: Patterns of culture are "culturally relative." If it is characteristic of myth "to represent the specifically cultural or conventional as both natural and sacred" (Rappaport, 1986, p. 323), the lesson of Mead's ethnography

is that our own ways are not humanly inevitable, not God-ordained, but the result of our symbolic, discursive universe of human culture. It is not that such understandings are any less important in our contemporary globalized world; the point to be understood here regarding the descriptive nature of CAS's language as discourse is that, on the surface, it is descriptive, "documentary," but it is not a mythical discourse. Not even Freeman claims that it amounts to a myth; he claims that it is mistaken because it *omits* what *he* could observe. What is omitted? In the chapters that Freeman (1983) wrote on childrearing and punishment (Chapters 13 and 14), he claims that there is strong mother–child bonding in Samoa, that parental discipline is severe, and that there is a high level of aggression and violence toward children and adolescents.[1] He does not, however, argue that Mead's descriptions of early childhood education are wrong; if they are inadequate, it is because of the discursive presence of something that he is missing in the descriptions.

Again, it is possible, as Freeman probably does, to understand this absence as a methodological failure of the selection procedure, that is, that it is not sufficiently objective in the reality of obtaining, selecting, and presenting data (due to Mead's subjective desire to "find" a culture with less violent or repressive education). However, with different selection, and with Freeman's additional "data and observation," are we actually reading an objective account of Samoan early childhood education? Of course not. His criteria for analysis are again subjective, as his key references for selection are explicitly Mead's own findings and the generalizations in CAS that he is trying to refute. The key for selection is finding cases that prove his different generalizations. In both cases, however, the results are not simply "descriptions," but two different *accounts* of culture, including early childhood education. To a certain extent, they are probably both right. As Kuper (1989) writes, "Freeman may be presenting the point of view of respectable elders, while Mead (who participated mainly in the lives of the adolescent girls) may be generalizing from what was an informal sub-culture" (p. 25). However, if we were satisfied with this conclusion, we would simply miss the essential difference between these two accounts as *discourses*. The assumption of Freeman's objectivity discourse is that by adding opposing observations, it rejects the findings and key theses of Mead's research. However, even the facts do not speak for themselves, they have to be substantiated (Kuper, 1989; Levy, 1984; Strikwerda, 1991). Also Mead's discourse is conceived as an objective assessment, but it is more complex than it appears from its objective, descriptive character. Through, on the first level, the objective description of reality, the discourse evokes what is absent from it, what does not exist in the descriptions, even though the reader would expect it to be present. That which is "absent" is the "concealed" subjective truth of the discourse; for the reader, it is the "genuine truth," the true message. This is because its subject, that which "creates" the discursive presence of absence, is the reader himself or herself, that is, the reader, subjected to his or her own internalized cultural norms, generates this absence from the content of objectified descriptions.

If we want to understand the true extent of Mead's discourse in CAS, that which is the discursive subjective truth, it is necessary to introduce the difference between statement and enunciation—otherwise common in linguistics—in a specific psychoanalytic sense (Lacan, 1966; Žižek, 2012), according to which enunciation is the place at which the subject of the unconscious is uttered. In Lacanian theory, the unconscious is situated in discourse (the Other), as reflected in his famous phrase, "the unconscious is structured like a language." It is through the act of enunciation that we have access to the unconscious in the psychoanalytic sense. Therefore, the unconscious should not be understood as something that is "deeply hidden" in a particular human being; rather, it is a discursive phenomenon, it exists on its surface; for instance, it emerges in the act of enunciation through internalized cultural norms. Lacan (1966) writes that "the presence of the unconscious, being situated in the locus of the Other, can be found in every discourse, in its enunciation" (p. 834).

Through the discourse of CAS, the unconscious truth emerges only from within the *gap* between the enunciated content (for instance, Mead's objectivized presentations of "Samoan early childhood education," "sex relations," etc.) and the subjective position of enunciation (the "absent" patterns of violence, discipline, severe parental control, etc.). The truth emerges as a surprise from within the reader's own embeddedness in Western patriarchal culture, through comparison with his or her own patterns of education.

For instance, according to Mead's (1928) description of early childhood education in the chapter "The Education of the Samoan Child" (pp. 16–28), the education and socialization of children after weaning was the responsibility mainly of girls from 6 or 7 years of age onward. Adolescent girls were "released from baby-tending" (Mead, 1928, p. 21). Mead writes that "from the birth until the age of four or five a child's education is exceedingly simple" (Mead, 1928, p. 18). There were only a limited number of rules, "really simply a series of avoidances" (Mead, 1928, p. 18), that they had to learn and internalize in their first few years:

> They must be housebroken . . . They must learn to sit or crawl within the house and never to stand upright unless it is absolutely necessary; never to address an adult in a standing position; to stay out of the sun; not to tangle the strands of the weaver; not to scatter the cut-up cocoanut which is spread out to dry; to keep their scant loin clothes at least nominally fastened to their persons; to treat fire and knives with proper caution; if their father is a chief, not to crawl on his bed place when he is by. These are really simply a series of avoidances, enforced by occasional cuffing and a deal of exasperated shouting and ineffectual conversation. (Mead, 1928, p. 18)

For a reader raised in a patriarchal, authoritarian culture of violence, these and other descriptions of early childhood education in CAS indicate childhood education with an

absence of the violence "familiar to the reader." The absence of certain cultural patterns in Western culture is perhaps even more apparent through the *presence* of descriptions in Chapter 7, which relate to formal sexual relations, that is, through the descriptions of romantic love encounters of young people under palm trees, the promiscuous sexuality of adolescents of both genders before marriage, the carefree attitude toward faithfulness in marriage, the fact that the taboo of virginity only applies to *taupou* and not to the rest of the girls, and so on.

Insufficiencies on the level of scientific striving for objectivity are, at the same time, the advantage of such ethnographic enquiry, resulting in the emergence of the subject of unconsciousness that is inscribed in objectivized scientific discourse. It is the gap in the discourse between the enunciated content (descriptions) and the subjective position of enunciation (that which it produces in the descriptions as absent) that is key to the truth. Mead produced a double-coined research discourse: on the surface, mostly a descriptive discourse, but a discourse that "turned students on" because of its cultural suppressed message, which emerges through what is recognized as absent in it. However, the place from which this absence is "objectivized" as *truthful*—valid and reliable—is not Mead, but the reader himself or herself. Within objective descriptions of cultural patterns of education that appear as less violent, less demanding, and less repressive (in comparison with Western patriarchal educational culture of that period) emerge the subjective truth of the discourse: that different cultural patterns exist, that they are therefore possible, and so on (and that "*I* can bear witness to and recognize this through what I have missed in my own experience"). Of course, this "humane and liberating" message of the discourse is deeply political. CAS is a piece of scholarship, but its advantage is that it is not afraid of placing itself in relation to the field of cultural politics, or to put it differently, as has been already noted, it does not place itself "outside politics" (Strikwerda, 1991, p. 303).

Kuper (1989) writes that "the consensus among anthropologists is that both Mead and Freeman over-generalized in characterizing the 'ethos' of Samoan Culture; in any case, defining national character is a hopelessly subjective and impressionistic project, which most contemporary anthropologists have abandoned" (p. 23). Indeed, in CAS, we find generalized definitions of the "ethos" of Samoan Culture, which may be understood as defining a "national character." For instance, Mead (1928) depicted patterns of life in Samoa (on the island of Taū, in the Manu'a Archipelago in the mid-1920s) in general as contrasted with America, but also with "most primitive civilizations," with Samoa's "casual attitude towards life," "avoidance of conflict, of poignant situations" (p. 138). From the perspective of contemporary methodological criteria of qualitative and ethnographic enquiry, there are many such overgeneralizations in CAS. As these generalizations in CAS are the fundamental starting points of Freeman's research and discourse (not an objective analysis of culture in Samoa), he himself creates the opposite overgeneralization of Samoan culture, a kind of mirror images of the generalizations in CAS. The essential difference between the two studies is therefore in originality and in the fact that Western culture is the starting point of the research while being its basis and the *reverse side of the discourse* in CAS (its subjective position of enunciation). We should note, however, that Mead does not try to define "American national character." Her starting point is *individual traits* of this culture, the traits that she perceives as overly repressive in relation to education, sexuality, and so on. It is in this area that Mead takes aim very precisely. Many theoretical and analytical parts of the text are, from today's theoretical and methodological perspective, probably naïve or flawed. However, the originality of the *discourse* in CAS is in its descriptive parts, in that, due to the subjective criteria of *certain* patterns of Western culture, the discursive descriptions of cultural and behavioral patterns in Samoa recognize a difference, which is perceived by readers enculturated in the cultural norms of the West. The discourse of CAS evokes what these norms "miss." The subjective truth of the discourse is structured as the evocation of the "collective unconscious" of Western culture, but not of its "whole," not of collective "national character," but merely of its individual elements, that is, patriarchal, repressive authoritarian patterns. The subjective truth of the discourse in CAS may explain why the book has been so successful among generations of readers over the decades, but this can only arise through the objectivity of scientific discourse whose goal is truth.

## *Understanding CAS's Educational Discourse in Relation to Freeman's Account of Education in Samoa*

We now come to the second research question and the field of education. Mead's question was whether adolescence was necessarily a period of conflict and stress due to the inescapable biological processes of puberty or whether this was the result of culture, that is, the specific cultural pressures caused by patterns of American culture. According to Mead, adolescent girls in Samoa seemed to have an untroubled passage to maturity in general. However, she also found exceptions to the rule: a few sulky, angry girls. Her conclusion was that the storm and stress of American adolescence was a culture-specific phenomenon, largely caused by cultural patterns and the intense pressures of family life. Freeman disagrees with most of Mead's ethnographic generalizations. According to his account, early childhood education in Samoa is characterized by strong mother–child bonding and severe parental discipline, and there is a high level of aggression and violence in childhood and later. Apparently, we are confronted with two contradictory accounts of patterns of Samoan culture, especially in relation to education and sex.

Mead's research question as to whether adolescence is necessarily a period of conflict and stress has been surpassed

today.[2] The question that is interesting from the point of view of ethnographic research is how to understand the findings of these two apparently contradictory accounts of culture in Samoa, assuming that both of them fail to provide a full account, and yet have certain ethnographic accuracy and merit.

Answers to such questions require the introduction of educational theories or theories that enable an understanding of educational *discourse*, that is, an understanding of descriptions of certain typical behaviors of those who educate, descriptions of relationships between children and those who educate, and descriptions of the general cultural patterns that establish and shape these relationships, as well as the authority of parents and caregivers in relation to children.

In Freeman's (1983) critique, two chapters are directly associated with education: "Punishment" and "Childrearing." Freeman demonstrates that culture and education in Samoa in the 1920s were more hierarchical and repressive than depicted by Mead. In line with this, he writes at the beginning of the chapter entitled "Punishment":

> Samoan society as depicted by Mead was neither severe not punitive. Rather, so she asserted, the Samoans inhabit a social order that "is kind to all and does not make sufficient demands upon any." These assertions are inaccurate and misleading. (Freeman, 1983, p. 191)

In contrast to Mead's depiction of Samoa's gentle culture, Freeman (1983) describes various cases of punishment and hierarchical order in Samoan society. However, in this chapter, he describes mostly patterns of punishment in adult life in Samoa, not in early childhood education, with the implication that cases of frequent severe punishment reflect general patterns of culture. Freeman (1983) mentions that "the Samoan term for obedience, *usiusita'i*, refers specifically to the action of listening to an instruction and then unquestioningly carrying it out," and this obedience "is greatly lauded, especially in untitled men, members of the *'aumaga*, whose principal obligation is to serve the chiefs . . ." (p. 192). In 1941, this cultural pattern was mentioned in court in the defense of seven such untitled men who assaulted a man in their village, with the claim that they were merely "blindly obeying" the edicts of their chiefs as Samoan custom required. The position of an educator who demands *blind obedience* corresponds to the authoritarian type of authority. It means that *my Command is the Law*, that the meaning of a Law is defined through that which the chiefs, as its bearers, say it is.

In the next chapter "Childrearing," explicitly referring to Bowlby's attachment theory, Freeman argues that mother–child attachment is much closer than Mead suggests when she emphasizes how, within a Samoan extended family, an infant is succored by "women of all ages and none of them have disciplined it." In the concluding sections, he summarizes his observations, saying that "Samoan social organization, then, is markedly authoritarian and depends directly on a system of severe discipline . . ." (Freeman, 1983, p. 209). However, Freeman's emphasis on the attachment between child and mother in the first years of childhood does not contradict anything described in CAS. Similarly, the examples of violence that he describes do not prove that Mead's descriptions are incorrect.

Freeman implicitly establishes a link between patterns of punishment, as he describes them himself, and the hierarchical nature of society, on one hand, and *the repressive patterns of culture and education*, on the other. Therefore, the question emerges in relation to CAS: If Mead's descriptions of early childhood education *are right*, does the reduced significance of *strict*—or purely physical—*punishment* in education necessarily mean that education is nonauthoritative, noncoercive?

It is necessary to resort to the help of educational theories and concepts to be able to interpret the apparent contradiction between cases of violence and authoritarianism (Freeman), on one hand, and the prevailing absence of violence in early education (2–6 years of age) described in CAS, on the other. In the second half of the 20th century, considerable attention was focused on authoritarianism and concepts of authority in the educational context. In her initial studies of authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative parenting in the 1960s and 1970s (Baumrind, 1966, 1967, 1971), Baumrind constructed a concept of permissive indulgent parents (as she called them in her early research), who are emotional, caring, and involved, but tend to be extremely tolerant and exercise little or no control and discipline. Baumrind found that, in many respects, children of permissive parents did not differ significantly from children of authoritarian parents. Authoritarian parents are severe, demanding, intolerant, autocratic, nonresponsive, and punitive. In contrast to both, authoritative parents are firm but fair and establish demands and discipline in an atmosphere of care. Baumrind's research showed that authoritative behavior of parents is linked to independent, purposive behavior in children and that authoritative parental control is clearly associated with all social responsibility indices in boys compared with authoritarian and permissive parental control, as well as being associated with high achievement in girls (Baumrind, 1971).

The results of recent studies show the same basic patterns (Bernstein, 2013; Dusi, 2012; Kuhar & Reiter, 2013; Maccoby, 1992; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Parke & Buriel, 2006; Paulson et al., 1998; Pellerin, 2005). In a meta-study of 1,435 studies that identified a relationship between family education models and externalized symptoms in children and adolescents, Pinquart finds that parental warmth, behavioral control, autonomy granting, and an authoritative parenting style showed very small to small negative concurrent and longitudinal associations with externalizing problems. In contrast, harsh control, psychological control, and authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful parenting were associated with higher levels of externalizing problems (Pinquart,

2017). Thus, the violent behavior of children resulting from permissive education can be added to authoritarian (often also physical) violence in education as a cause of "externalizing problems" (Krek, 2019). According to Mead, adolescent girls in Samoa had an untroubled passage to maturity, and their adolescence was not a period of conflict and stress. How can we understand her findings through the concepts of recent empirical research on authority in education? It would follow that neither authoritarian nor permissive patterns *prevailed* in early childhood education in Samoa at the time of her research. Could we therefore understand early childhood education as being predominantly authoritative?

In his classic study *The Culture of Narcissism* (Lasch, 1979), Lasch links permissiveness with "the absence of the father" and "the abdication" or "the breakdown of authority" in contemporary society. For instance, following Rogow, Lasch (1979) finds that American parents are alternatively "permissive and wavering" (p. 178) in their behavior with young people and find that it is easier to achieve conformity if they submit to bribery than if they deal with the emotional agitation associated with repressing the child's demands. To understand this in Freudian terms, *the pleasure principle* can itself lead parents to permissive behaviors: They do everything in order not to have to "deal with emotional agitation" in relation to the child and not to perform an action that should follow as a confrontation to the child's resistance to their posed expectations. Referring to Rose in his analysis, Lasch (1979) writes, "Some parents, for example, are incapable of such things as putting the child to bed if the child protests or is not able to contain his or her aggressiveness . . ." (p. 166). Obviously, the point here is not so much connected with the *content* of the norm or rule, as with the inability, the incapacity, of parents to *implement*, to *impose*, a particular norm or rule in relation to the child. Parents are aware of what they "want" or what they "should do," but they nevertheless "give in," they do not insist on the demand set. In Lacanian psychoanalytic terms, the key consequence of this specific subjective uncertainty of parents is *the absence of the symbolic Law* in their speech and in education acts. The absence of the symbolic Law in discourse is a key trait of permissiveness.

Following this criterion, how can we understand Mead's description of early childhood education in Samoa?

In Freeman's account, Samoan society of that period was, of course, not a permissive society. To be precise, however, in Lacanian terms, through authoritarian patterns of culture, he is describing the Law of *jouissance*, enjoyment, that, at least in the male part of the culture, also functioned as irrational enjoyment, through unquestionable, irresistible *Super-Ego* command. However, it does not follow from this that the *symbolic* Law was absent in the social fabric. Quite the opposite. Both Mead and Freeman describe the society's hierarchical structures, from which we may conclude that the existence of the symbolic Law was a cultural pattern of Samoan society, existing in the discourse of Samoan custom and through its enforcement (for instance, through education and also punishment). Based on particular Samoan cultural norms, the Law existed as *the symbolic Law* in discourse, mediated "through the chiefs" and its actual enforcement through all elders with regard to younger people, including girls who were in charge of younger children.

Freeman's point of departure is the position of respectable elders, and as evidence he describes the authoritarian action of chiefs in relation to untitled men. The education practiced by the young girls with regard to the young children entrusted to them also had elements of coercion, but their educational behavior, means of coercion, and authority differed significantly from the behavior, authority, and power of the chiefs. If we place the descriptions of both anthropologists in the context of theories of authority in education, these differences in the behavior and type of authority of the two subgroups within a particular community come as no surprise. Both Mead's and Freeman's descriptions may be appropriate in terms of the scientific criteria of validity and reliability; what is mistaken is Freeman's understanding that the second perspective undermines the first. The differences in the descriptions and facts that the two authors highlight in the field of education are (more or less) a reflection of the real differences between these two subgroups in their hierarchical position and differences in gender, age, and socially expected behavior.

## *Cultural Patterns of Early Childhood Education in Samoa at the Beginning of the Previous Century: Was It Permissive?*

CAS's *educational discourse* of *early childhood* raises a third research question relevant to contemporary educational practice: If early childhood education in Samoa was as Mead described it in the chapter "The Education of the Samoan Child," does it follow that education in Samoa was permissive? To answer this question, we have to ask how these few rules were conceived and implemented by the young educators themselves, that is, by *girls* as their agents.

On one hand, there are Mead's descriptions of their actions, which on first glance might be understood as permissive behavior in education due to their nonviolent character. These rules were "enforced by occasional cuffing and a deal of exasperated shouting and ineffectual conversation." The shouting ("Come out of the sun," "Keep still," "Sit still," "Keep your mouths shut," etc.) was depicted by Mead as "uttered quite mechanically," whereas the requirement of silence is "continually mentioned and never enforced" (Mead, 1928, p. 18). Children responsible for even younger children feared the disagreeable consequences resulting from a child's crying, so that "long after there is any need for it, they succumb to some little tyrant's threat of making a scene and five-year-olds bully their way into expeditions of which they will have to be carried . . ." (Mead, 1928, p. 19).

On the other hand, Mead (1928) writes that

> this method of giving in, coaxing, bribing, diverting of infant disturbers is only pursued within the household or the relationship group, where there are duly constituted elders in authority to punish the older children who can't keep the babies still. Towards a neighbor's children or in a crowd of half-grown girls and boys even the adults vent their full irritation upon the heads of troublesome children. If a crowd of children are near enough, pressing in curiously to watch some spectacle at which they are not wanted, they are soundly lashed with palm leaves, or dispersed with a shower of small stones, of which the house floor always furnishes a ready supply . . . . And even these bursts of anger are nine-tenths gesture. No one who throws the stones actually means to hit the child, but the children know that if they repeat their intrusions too often, by the laws of chance some of the flying bits of corals will land in their faces. (p. 19)

However, "by the time a child is six or seven she has all the essential avoidances well enough by heart to be trusted with the care of a younger child. And she also develops some simple techniques" (Mead, 1928, p. 20). Girls were able to undertake the task of early education and socialization because, by the age of 6 or 7, they had internalized the norms—the "series of avoidances"—of Samoan culture. The pattern of education also implied that a child was *further* "disciplined and socialized through *responsibility* for a still younger one" (Mead, 1928, p. 19). From this chapter and elsewhere, it is clear that the hierarchical organization of society was in place.

For the operation of the "father function" or "symbolic Law" (Lacan, 1998, pp. 179–196) in moral education, the relationship of the caregiver toward her *own words* is crucial. Were the young Samoan caregiver's own words the law for themselves? Did their discourse and acts express a certainty of belief in those "simple" avoidances? We do not doubt that *in both accounts* of Samoan society of that period—Mead's and Freeman's—the answers should be positive. The girls, young caregivers, were submitted to *moral* restraint, and at the age of 7, they were able to pass that symbolic instance on to even younger children.

In Samoa of that period, the process of symbolic identification with adults, through which the child arrives at the internalization of the symbolic order, was undoubtedly functioning, meaning that the *Ego-Ideal*, as an internalized instance of the symbolic Law, had been initiated. Young girls did not function as a kind of "omnipotent" other who is always there and *satisfies the Demand* of the child (Krek, 2015). In response to the narcissistic demand of youngsters, they did not act violently, but stubbornly. They were not *severe* or even obsessively *cruel* representatives of the patterns of culture, but, while allowing the explorations of youngsters, they were persistent in repeating again and again precisely the *symbolic* norms of the society, the paternal law (Krek & Zabel, 2017). As bearers of early childhood education, they were clearly not permissive; even at a very young age, they were able to be *authoritative*.[3]

The question of contemporary permissiveness is not so much a question of *physical* violence or nonviolence toward the child, but a question of whether the symbolic Law exists or does not exist in discourse and in education as action. In Samoa at that time, small children were not brought up by adult men, and not even by their mothers or other adult women.[4] What is important, however, is that all children—boys and girls—aged 2 to 6 years were brought up by girls with similar patterns of upbringing, which were certainly not as authoritarian or violent as parents often *could* be in societies in the United States at the time. However, these girls did not practice care for young children in the way contemporary permissiveness does; while imposing the cultural norms of their culture, they held the place of the symbolic Law.

## Conclusion

Through this study, Mead interprets, at least to a certain extent, the state of her own culture (United States) at the time. It is therefore possible to understand the study published by Mead in its entirety as a text whose fundamental goal is not only to provide a description of culture in Samoa but also to offer an interpretation of patterns of Western culture: Mead's own Western culture is "reassessed" through descriptions of culture in Samoa, descriptions that serve as the "other" of Western culture. Mead's book enjoyed such incredible success among readers because it showed the hidden side of their own culture, the reverse perspective, and because it responded to the problems of their own society.

As early as in the 1960s, Mead was aware of various criticisms, including Freeman's, and of the possible different views on the culture of a particular community. In the final chapter of the reissue of *Social Organization of Manu'a* in 1969, she writes, "There is a serious problem of reconciling these contradictions between the mildness, the willingness to gloss over and compromise, which I found in Manu'a and other records of historical and contemporary behavior" (Mead, 1930/1969, p. 227). She explains that these differences are accounted for by her specific perspective, the particular locus in which she placed herself when describing Samoan culture in CAS: "the vantage point from which I saw it" (Mead, 1930/1969, p. 228) was the position of a young girl. The difference between Freeman's point of view of respectable elders and Mead's of adolescent girls is the objective difference in the social position of the subgroup, that is, those who educate, which is reflected in education as the difference between two contrasting modes of educational behavior and types of authority.

The originality of CAS as scientific work lies in the *conception* of its two overlapping discourses. On one hand, CAS follows the criteria of cultural anthropology as a science with its own domain of study, appropriate techniques, and methods producing valid and reliable knowledge in the domain; *at the same time*, however, it is a product of anthropology as cultural critique (of patriarchal, authoritarian Western culture), a discourse in its own right *with its own* criteria of

validity and reliability. The power of "cultural critique" stems not so much from Mead's explicit, "subjective" critical comments, which we also find in the text, but from the objectivized scientific descriptions of Samoan culture that simultaneously relate to the unconscious truth of a particular culture, a particular Other: Western culture. We have discovered that, through the discourse of CAS, the unconscious truth emerges only from the *gap* between Mead's objectivized presentations of "Samoan early childhood education," "sex relations," and so on and, for readers embedded in Western culture, the *absent* patterns of violence, discipline, severe parental control, and so in those descriptions. The point here is that the second discourse (the truth of the unconscious) had *its own* validity and reliability *for its readers*, and because of that "piece of truth," which is nevertheless essential, CAS generated the interest of a wider audience in a scientific anthropological study.

From the perspective of cultural anthropology as a social science that should produce objective, extensive information and knowledge about particular cultures, CAS could be regarded as a piece of scientific work that is "not so much incorrect as thin and in need of enrichment" (Rappaport, 1986, p. 347). However, if its goal is to produce new knowledge *about cultures*, a study that is conceived at the *intersection of cultures* and that surprises subjects of a particular Other as speech evoking that Other's "untold," suppressed content (and creates a political message as its secondary byproduct), it is an original work of cultural anthropology that bears the truth and as such is correct (valid and reliable), thick, and in no need of enrichment.

In the light of philosophy of education dealing with contemporary education that can, inter alia, use findings of cultural anthropology for its educational purposes, we have pointed out that Mead's descriptions of *early childhood education* in Samoa at that time depict educational behavior that was clearly not permissive. About a century later, in relation to contemporary permissive educational patterns of adult parents and teachers, CAS provides an intricate case study for understanding how even young girls as caregivers—supported by elders and patterns of culture—could hold the place of the symbolic Law and maintain authoritative behavior toward younger children entrusted to them.

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## Notes

1. We should note that he is mainly not referring to the data for the period of time of Mead's research, but for later decades. Although this is not insignificant for the value of his argument, for our argument it is not of crucial importance.
2. Freeman has not tried to provide any alternative theory on adolescence, and he does not oppose the idea that conflict and stress are *not* inevitable and universal in adolescence, which was Mead's general conclusion.
3. Types, possibilities, and prohibitions in the area of sexual relationships among youth and adults—although they were more strictly regulated, as Mead describes, within the context of bringing up children, whereby children up to 7 years of age are brought up by girls, or a girl, aged from 7 to 14 years, and in the formation of the fundamental structure of the personality in early youth—are not relevant in this context.
4. On entering puberty, a Samoan girl had more possibilities, as Mead would say, to experiment than a girl in Western culture at the time. Moreover, this freedom and the possibility of escaping from a particular situation that the individual perceived as unacceptable or violent pertained not only to sexuality but also to other cultural patterns.

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