

Margaret Mead

anthropologist, writer (1901-1977)

By the time of her death in 1977, Margaret Mead was the most famous anthropologist in the world. Her theories on gender roles and adolescence continue to affect the way we view the world today. Margaret Mead was born in Philadelphia on December 16, 1901. While Margaret's parents set rules and limits on her behavior, they also granted Margaret great physical and mental freedom, allowing her to study that which interested her. Eventually, she went to Barnard College in New York City and earned her doctorate from Columbia University.

In 1925, Margaret went to American Samoa for her first field work where she focused her studies on adolescent girls. *Coming of Age in Samoa* became a best seller and has been translated into many different languages. In this work, she posits the theory that the experiences occurring during developmental changes can be

influenced by societal standards and, therefore, can be less stormy or problematic in different cultures. Especially important in this work was the idea that the "civilized" world had something to learn from the "primitive" one.

Growing Up in New Guinea was based on the fieldwork Margaret did in 1929 with her second husband, Reo Fortune. In this groundbreaking work, Margaret demonstrates that gender roles vary from society to society depending on not only biology, but also cultural standards and practices.

In Bali, where she worked with her third husband, Gregory Bateson, Margaret explored the connection between childrearing and adult culture.

Throughout all of her work, there is the underlying belief that human diversity can be a valuable resource, not a handicap, and that all human beings have the capacity to learn from and teach each other.

Although she taught at a number of institutions, Margaret's primary professional base was at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. She authored over twenty books and coauthored an equal number. During her lifetime she received 28 honorary doctorates and was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom. She had one child, Mary Catherine Bateson, with her third husband.

Some thoughts from Margaret Mead:

"What we lack is not so much leisure to *do* as time to reflect and time to feel. What we seldom "take" is time to experience the things that have happened, the things that are happening, the things that are still ahead of us."

- Margaret Mead and Rhoda Metraux, *A Way of Seeing* (1970)

“We end up with the contradictory picture of a society that appears to throw its doors wide open to women, but translates her every step towards success as having been damaging.”

- Margaret Mead, *Male and Female* (1949)

“Our humanity rests upon a series of learned behaviors, woven together into patterns that are infinitely fragile and never directly inherited.”

- Margaret Mead, *Male and Female* (1949)

“Instead of being presented with stereotypes by age, sex, color, class, or religion, children must have the opportunity to learn that within each range, some people are loathsome and some are delightful.”

- Margaret Mead, *Twentieth Century Faith* (1972)

“There is no hierarchy of values by which one culture has the right to insist on all its own values and deny those of another.”

- Margaret Mead, *And Keep Your Powder Dry* (1942)

“No society that feeds its children on tales of successful violence can expect them not to believe that violence in the end is rewarded.”

- Margaret Mead, in *Redbook* (1963)

Margaret Mead’s works include:

Coming of Age in Samoa
Male and Female
Childhood in Contemporary Culture
Twentieth Century Faith
A Way of Seeing

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“Children must be taught how to think, not what to think.”