

## Short response No. 6

### Anthro, sex and marriage (About what Margaret Mead wrote on sex and marriage in 1953)

#### References:

**American President** (online). *An online reference resource* (Last visited on June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2009).

**Doherty, W.G.** (2000). Consumer Marriage. *Marriage and families*, August 2000 (online)

**Mead, M.** (2003) [1953]. Modern Marriage. *The Nation* (Internet source)

**Wikipedia** (online). Margaret Mead. (Internet source) (Last visited on June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2009).

**Student's related website:** Anthro, sex and marriage

[http://www.iianthropology.org/psychology\\_sex\\_and\\_marriage\\_mead.html](http://www.iianthropology.org/psychology_sex_and_marriage_mead.html)

Margaret Mead is one of the most prominent American anthropologists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century not only because of her field ethnographic research and publications, but also because of her social active position and public appearance. The thoughts on sex and modern marriage from 1953 came out when in the world was the power of the Cold War as a glacier of the human relationships. This was toward the end of the Period of Depression and World Conflict (1921-1963) and abt 8 years before the beginning of the Social Change and Soviet relationships (1961-1989). Also, Mead wrote her essay in the period in which perhaps her third marriage had collapsed or even she was in a process of divorced from Gregory Bateson, also a prominent anthropologist. Then, many of the pessimistic thoughts in the essay could be just a reflection of the cold time and of a cold period her personal life. For instance, she wrote:

“The principal threat to the success of such [post World War II] marriage comes from timing.... Two people who built their whole relationship on a cheerful, frank partnership in rearing children, and enjoying mountain-climbing picnics, now face each other for the first time [Launching adult children's period – L.N.] in all these years across a dining-room table, alone. Here the lack of complexity in their relationships, the lack of erotic sophistication in the male, who has substituted the demand that his wife show “normal sex feeling” for any demand on himself for elaboration of love-making manners, begin to show...”

Such straight conclusion is not very usual in anthropology, since the last is a discipline about the diversity in life and in the cultures. Today there is also a distinction between sex and gender while in 1950s the gender problems had been obviously still analyzed as sex ones. The deconstructing the history of marriage reveals also opportunity for concept like “psychological marriage” that replaced the “institutional marriage”, in which “families existed for individuals rather than vice versa” (Doherty 2000). However, there are theoretical base and emotional motivation in the essay of Mead that makes nowadays her writing as fresh as in 1953.

To begin with, the real statement of the longevity and the complexity of the relationships based on marriage and sex. Today we recognize five periods in the family life cycle: independence, coupling or marriage, parenting (babies through adolescents), launching adult children and retirement (or senior) years. Although without such brief distinction, Mead focuses on the dialectics of the sexual relationships and chose the social clothes of the changing role of women in society. As we know from the system theory, the change especially of one key agent impacts all system. In my opinion, Mead had pointed exactly to the core factor in the changing meaning of marriage in the USA after the Second World War – the women’s emancipation. Last but not least, she also gives a prospective view on the opportunity for keeping the successful marriage by changing the family and out-of family social environments – from new job for the husband to new friends and new landscape. Such cultural-anthropological points could be instructive for many families and family therapists.

To conclude, in my mind is the thought of Margaret Mead towards the end of the essay that can be expanded for the whole life cycle of people – since the moment we have started building our gender personality, our everydayness and eventness become about realizing and extending the depth of our sex feelings, as one of the main branches in our tree of life.