



Theorizing Self in Samoa: Emotions, Genders, and Sexualities

Jeannette Marie Mageo

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Theorizing Self in Samoa develops a new theory of the self in culture through a psychological and historical ethnography of Samoa. As in many non-Western cultures, Samoan understandings of the self are more sociocentric--accentuating the social roles that people play--than egocentric--emphasizing individual, interior feelings and perceptions. Yet in Samoa, as in any culture, aspects of the self that are not emphasized in cultural explanations of personhood continually reappear, and must somehow be accounted for. Jeannette Marie Mageo argues that all cultures attempt to encompass these stray experiences of the self within a discursive system. She introduces a way of charting human development through cultural discourses, which helps reveal how emotion, gender, and sexuality are constructed in Samoan society and other cultures, including our own.

The second half of the book explores the effects of cultural contact and colonialization on the innermost experience of cultural subjects. With its long ethnographic record, Samoa provides a unique opportunity to consider the dialectic between historical change and personal experience, opening a perspective on the ways in which cultural history is forever leaving its fingerprints upon human lives.

Theorizing Self in Samoa marks out important territory for psychological anthropology and students of Oceania, and will appeal also to students and scholars in cultural studies, women's studies, and history.

Jeannette Marie Mageo is Associate Professor of Anthropology, Washington State University.

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