

## ADOPTION AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHILDREN TO HAWAIIAN FAMILIES <sup>1</sup>

It is a popular cliché that Hawaiians "love children" and it is indeed true that having children around is felt to be vitally important to the happiness of Hawaiian families. One frequently hears women comment that without children they would be "lost," and both men and women state that having children brings a husband and wife closer together. In many respects the strongest tie between husband and wife is as parents of the same children. Having a son to "carry on the family name" is frequently expressed as a desired goal.

Our data on the fertility of women show that it is usual for Hawaiian women to have from 4 to 8 children during their reproductive years. Since it has been frequently speculated that low-income populations generally have large families as a result of inadequate knowledge of family planning, we asked our informants (65 men and 78 women) how many children they considered ideal. The modal response for both men and women was 4 children, 2 boys and 2 girls. However, the mean was 5.6, and while only 10 men and 5 women thought that less than 4 children was ideal (the minimum being 2), 24 men and 30 women preferred 6 or more children. It therefore appears that large family size is in part, at least, an expression of Hawaiian values rather than a mere absence of family planning. It is entirely consistent with the emphasis on affiliation that dominates their life style.

The majority of couples on whom we have data did not or do not use contraceptive methods (see Table 1). It is somewhat more common for the wife to be sterilized after she bears enough children to suit herself and her husband (26 out of 82 cases), than it is for the husband to be operated upon (2 cases).

Another expression of the desire for children is the adoption rate in Hawaiian communities. Although some observers have inferred that this high adoption rate is associated with the breakdown of family ties, our evidence does not bear this out.

In 1967 we distributed household questionnaires to 4 Hawaiian home-  
stead communities on Oahu through the auspices of the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands. Included in the questionnaires were items pertaining to legally adopted and hanai children in the household.<sup>2</sup> Forms were received from 681 households out of a total of 1,022 to which they

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<sup>1</sup> Contributed by Alan Howard (Bernice P. Bishop Museum), this study contains substantial portions taken from Howard, Heighton, Jordan, and Gallimore (1967), and the remainder based on data obtained in the 1967 summer survey (see "Appendix").

<sup>2</sup> Hanai is an Hawaiian term designating an agreement to transfer primary parental rights over a child.

were sent, representing a 66.6% return. One hundred and thirty-two, or 19.4% reported either a legally adopted or hanai child in the household. An additional 56 households contained children under 18 years of age who were living in a condition of fosterage, i.e., neither of their legal parents were present in the household. This brought the number of households containing adopted children to 188, or 27.6% of the total number responding. Altogether 334 adopted children were included in these 188 households, a mean of 1.8 per household. A breakdown of the figures and percentages by type of adoption in the 4 communities appears in Tables 2 and 3 respectively

The figures obtained for the homestead communities are consistent with those obtained by Forster in his study of two rural communities on Maui. He found that 17 out of a total of 73 Hawaiian households, or 23.2%, contained adopted members. The 17 households contained a total of 39 children who were considered hanai but were not legally adopted, and 3 who were legally adopted, for a mean of 2.5 per household (1960:97)

Although adoption remains prevalent, the forms that it takes, the terminology used to describe it, its functions, and the motives behind it have all been modified. In general, Hawaiian concepts are rarely used when talking about adoption. When speaking about the subject, our informants usually say something like, "I took \_\_\_\_\_ when he was two weeks old," or "She was taken by her grandmother." The term hanai is still used on occasion, but the scope of its definition varies. Some people use it to refer to any fosterage, permanent or temporary, child or adult, that involves the assumption of economic responsibility for more than a few weeks. Others restrict it to relatively permanent arrangements involving the full assumption of parental rights and obligations. When pressed, most of our informants distinguished between adoption and hanai, with the former referring to a legal and the latter to a non-legal assumption of parental rights and obligations.

Despite the assertion by Kenn that today "there is often indiscriminate adoption without knowing the background of the child" (1939:47), our evidence suggests a strong preference for adopting the children of relatives or close friends among modern Hawaiians. Thus Forster found that 37 of the 39 hanai children in his communities had come from the family of relatives. The 2 exceptions were cases involving close friends (1960:97). In our homestead sample of 334 adopted children, 268 (80.2%) were known to have come from relatives, 48 (14.4%) came from non-relatives, and for 17 (5.1%) there was no information. Of those from non-relatives, 24 were said to have been obtained from friends, and for 13 no additional information was available; only 11 had come from institutions (see Table 4). Significantly, the Liliuokalani Trust, whose child welfare section is concerned with the placement of orphaned Hawaiian children, reports that in 1965 only 4 of the 17 children they placed in foster homes were taken by Hawaiian families. Only as a last resort do Hawaiians rely upon adoption agencies.

Several considerations seem to be involved in the desire to adopt only



from relatives or close friends. One is rooted in the widespread belief that a child's character is largely inherited; not knowing the parents of a foster child means that "you don't know what you're getting." Another is based on the premise that it is easier to deal with people with whom one already has an established "account" of reciprocal rights and obligations. Hawaiians feel that conflict is less likely with such people, and that any problems which do arise can be more easily mediated. If the natural parents are neither relatives nor friends, there is a lingering fear that the contract will be broken either by them or the child.

In contrast to the ideal middle-class mainland pattern, which stresses the severance of ties between an adopted child and his natural parents, Hawaiian ideology stresses the reverse. It is regarded as not only desirable for the child to know his natural parents but for him to maintain intimate contact with them as well.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it appears that Hawaiians adopt from relatives and friends because they are accustomed to fulfilling their needs through personalized transactions rather than through formal institutions.

The rule that Hawaiians adopt only from relatives or close friends is sometimes broken when no such children are available, or in situations in which a child has been abandoned or is otherwise in desperate circumstances. Such children will often be taken into a household, even if it is already very large and poverty-stricken:

A family with eleven children took in an unmarried girl who was about to have a child. They were having a difficult time supporting the large family, but did not refuse aid. The father worked for the W. P. A. earning about forty dollars a month. This amount was supplemented by fishing and by taro planted in the mountains. The young lady was allowed to stay in the home as long as she wanted to and left the child in the care of the family when she left. The child is treated as one of the family and no discriminations are made (Yamamura 1941:43).

However, despite a great show of compassion for children who need a home, resistance is sometimes given by relatives who disapprove of adopting unrelated children.

This emphasis on kinship seniority appears to have remained significant among modern Hawaiians, particularly with grandparents exerting pressure to hanai their children's children. In our homestead sample grandparents were the adopters of 169 of the 334 children (50.6%). If only those children adopted by relatives are considered, 70.8% were taken from the grandchild generation, 24.1% from the child generation, and 5.1% from the adopter's generation (see Table 4). While demands from grandparents are potent, they are not always submitted to by the younger generation. Many young parents refuse to give their children to anyone as long as they can adequately care for them. It can be

assumed that acculturation has softened their expectations of supernatural sanctions for denying a request

An examination of Table 4 also reveals that adoption transactions are usually carried out between female relatives. In the grandchild category, for example, daughter's children outnumber son's children by 107 to 28, while in the other categories maternal kin (i.e., with the child related to a female adopter) outnumber paternal kin (i.e., with the child related to a male adopter) by 65 to 19. If we presume that the degree of formality in relationships is inversely correlated to the strength of kinship ties, we find that the weakness of male links is also revealed by the types of adoptions represented in the maternal and paternal categories. Among paternal kin 10 out of 19 children (52.6%) were legally adopted, while among maternal kin only 17 out of 65 (26.2%) fell into this category. In the grandchild category, where one would expect relationship ties to be strongest, only 20 out of 169 adoptions (11.8%) were legalized. Given this general female bias, the data also show a tendency for individuals, when adopting in the child generation, to take children from a sibling of the same sex. Thus women adopters took 21 children from their sisters and only 9 from their brothers, while men adopters took 7 children from their brothers and 5 from their sisters.

The traditional preference for adopting children at birth or shortly thereafter is still pronounced among our contemporary informants. It is clear that the large majority of hanai cases involve infants. In our homestead sample 29.2% of the children, on whom we had information (legally adopted and hanai categories only), were taken at birth and an additional 41.6% were taken before the child was 6 months old. Only 18.5% were taken after the age of 1 year (see Table 5). The age position of the adopted child to the other children in the adopting family is presented in Table 6.

The traditional Hawaiian principle that the first born male child belongs to the father's side and the first female child to the mother's seems to be less in evidence among modern Hawaiians. Perhaps this is because there are other traditional principles still operating as general guides to interpersonal relations, whereas the sex principle used in the adoption of grandchildren involves the application of a highly specific rule.

Our data on sex of adopted children indicates a slight favoritism for males (52.0%). It should be noted, however, that in the category of legal adoptions males are more strongly represented (58.6%) (see Table 7). This may be a reflection of the importance attached to "passing on the name" by many modern Hawaiians.

One very noticeable trend stands out in our investigations into modern Hawaiian adoption practices; namely, an increasing concern for legalizing adoptions. Of the 334 children in our homestead sample 88 (26.3%) were legally adopted. While this is most pronounced when the foster child is unrelated (37.5%), even close relatives are apt to ask,



or in some cases demand, permission to legally adopt hanai children. This is sometimes motivated by a desire for legal protection of the child with regard to inheritance, etc., but by far the most frequent reason given is a fear that the natural parents will take back the child. Our informants have provided us with numerous instances in which such conflicts have arisen, and they invariably reported them with great emotion.

Our observational data indicate that under most circumstances hanai children are treated with, if anything, somewhat more indulgence than natural children. When there are other children in the household, however, a pronounced egalitarianism is usually espoused. All those informants who had assumed full parental rights insisted that they loved all their children equally and that hanai children were entitled to their share of the inheritance. Thus far, we have insufficient evidence either to support or repudiate this claim to inheritance equality, but "playing favorites" is considered a very bad thing for parents to do, and although emotional commitments to different children within a household may vary, most parents make a strong effort to see that no one child gets substantially more or less material benefits than any other.

The terminology used by adopted children to refer to their foster parents varies with the circumstances. If the adoption took place at birth or shortly after the common English parental terms -- "ma," "mom," "mama," "dad," "daddy," etc. -- are applied, although if the adopters are grandparents they are still usually called "grandma" and "grandpa." When adults speak about relatives by adoption, they most often use terms appropriate to a natural offspring of their foster parents, although they may qualify relations at times by saying such things as, "my hanai mother" or "my uncle on my hanai father's side." Such qualifications are likely to be used only if the person speaking had maintained relations with his natural parents or their relatives. The degree to which this occurs generally depends upon residential proximity more than any other factor. When the natural parents live near to the adopters, the foster children may have nearly equal contact with both family groups. Both sets of parents sometimes exercise parental rights, i.e., feeding the child and disciplining him. This is known to have become a source of conflict between such families. When both sets of parents are socially present, the child often uses two sets of contrasting terms to refer to them, perhaps calling one set something like "mom" and "dad" and the other "mama" and "papa." When the natural parents live far away or otherwise do not maintain their ties with the adopting family, they are likely to become no more than genealogical shadows for whom the child has little regard. What is important under most circumstances is the social and emotional ties between individuals, rather than the specific nature of kinship links (natural or adoptive) between them. In fact, considerable confusion often arises in the minds of individuals involved in adoptive relationships about the nature of their kinship ties to one another, as can be seen in the following attempt of a woman to describe her relationship to her hanai daughter:

Kealoha is my brother's child. Of course my brother isn't really my brother as both he and I are hanai children of my father. I guess my father isn't really my father, is he? I know who my real mother is but I don't like her and I never see her. My hanai brother is half-Hawaiian and I am pure Hawaiian. We aren't really any blood relation I guess, but I always think of him as my brother and I always think of my father as my father. I think maybe Papa is my grandfather's brother; I am not sure as we never asked such things. So I don't know what relationship Kealoha really is though I call her my child (Hormann, ms.).

We have thus far discovered few consistencies in the attitudes toward their natural and foster parents on the part of adults who grew up as hanai children. The whole range is represented--from people who as adults are very close to their foster parents and completely alien to their natural parents, to the reverse. Much depends upon the vicissitudes of residential proximity, economic circumstances, and interpersonal conflict and crises. A tentative generalization, however, is that whereas Hawaiians do not seem to feel compelled to honor biological relationships for their own sake, they usually do feel a sense of obligation toward their foster parents for having raised them.

Several motives seem to affect the decisions of present-day parents to allow their children to be adopted by others. These include some of the traditional reasons, plus a few new ones. The fear of harm to the child through sorcery, if a request to adopt is refused, is not as strong or as prevalent a motive as it once was, but it is still present. Thus, some of our informants have indicated that would-be adopters, if refused, might bring harm to the child through sorcery as a result of their envy or jealousy.

Related to this concept is the idea that harm may come to a child over whom there is ill feeling, not as a result of intentional sorcery, but from the presence of the hostile feeling itself. The same sanctions also operate against attempts to take back a hanai child who has been given out. Evidently it is not the regaining of the child which threatens disaster, but the act of taking him from the foster parents. Once the foster parents die, or if a third party takes the child from the foster parents, the natural parents may take their child back without fear of harm.

A second form of sanction, more secular in nature, is the expressed feeling that anyone with many children, especially many young children, has an obligation to "share the wealth" by giving children to childless relatives who want to hanai them. In talking about attempts to adopt, remarks like, "She has six children," or "This is her eighth child," are frequently made with reference to the natural mother; they carry the implication that anyone so blessed can certainly afford to give away one child. A family with many children which refused to give one to a close relative without any children would be accused of being stingy. Related



to this is the belief that the adoption of a child by a childless couple promotes fertility and thereby permits them to produce children of their own.

At this point in our analysis we do not have an entirely satisfactory explanation of why Hawaiians take such special pleasure in having children around. It is clear that no immediate economic advantage, e.g., having additional help, is gained, and, indeed, more mouths can be a burden. For the present it is perhaps best to suggest that psychological factors associated with the affiliative life style are involved. Most of the women who adopt are past 35 years of age (see Table 8). This suggests that they are past the age of child bearing or are mothers of girls in their child bearing years. It may be that a family life which involves the care of small children is highly valued even by older women. Although many of these older women will have reared large families of their own, there are apparently some aspects of the role of mother which do not lose their appeal.

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Table 1

## Use of Contraceptive Methods

<u>Method used</u>	<u>Number</u>
none . . . . .	68
male prophylactic .	1
diaphragm . . .	5
sperm jelly .	4
pills . . . . .	4
rhythm . . . . .	1
jelly plus pill .	3
other . . . . .	1
no data . . . . .	11



Table 2

## Frequency of Adoption by Types in Four Hawaiian Homestead Communities

	<u>Nanakuli</u>	<u>Waimanalo</u>	<u>Kewalo</u>	<u>Papakolea</u>	<u>Totals</u>
Households reporting legal adoption	30	11	18	6	65
Number of children	(40)	(11)	(30)	(7)	(88)
Households reporting <u>hanai</u>	44	13	12	4	73
Number of children	(60)	(18)	(15)	(9)	(102)
Households reporting fosterage	34	18	20	4	76
Number of children	(58)	(33)	(48)	(5)	(144)
Total households with all types*	108	42	50	14	214
Total number of children	(158)	(62)	(93)	(21)	(334)
Number of households with adopted children of any type**	86	40	49	13	188
Total households responding	265	210	155	51	681
Per cent of households with adopted children of any type	32 5%	19 1% <del>4.8%</del>	31.6%	25 5%	27 6%

\* This category counts a particular household once for each type of adoption occurring in the household. Three households contain legal and hanai types of adoption, 8 contain legal and fosterage types, 9 contain hanai and fosterage, and 3 contain children adopted by all three methods

\*\* This category is the total number of households reporting any type of adoption (legal, hanai, and fosterage)

\*\*\* The Waimanalo rate is significantly lower than the other three home-stead areas. It is a newer community and may have a lower proportion of women over 35 years of age, the age most often adopting children in the other communities (See Table 8 )

Table 3

Percentage of Adopted Children by Type and Households  
Reporting Adoptions by Types\*

	<u>Nanakuli</u>	<u>Waimanalo</u>	<u>Kewalo</u>	<u>Papakolea</u>	<u>Totals</u>
Number of children involved in legal adoption, <u>hanai</u> , or fosterage	158	62	93	21	334
Per cent of all adopted children who were legal- ly adopted (number of children in parentheses)	25.3% (40)	17.7% (11)	32.3% (30)	33.3% (7)	26.3% (88)
Per cent of adopted chil- dren who were <u>hanai</u> (number of children in parentheses)	38.0% (60)	29.0% (18)	16.1% (15)	42.9% (9)	30.5% (102)
Per cent of adopted children who were foster children (number of children in parentheses)	36.7% (58)	53.2% (33)	51.6% (48)	23.8% (5)	43.1% (144)
Number of households with adopted children of any type	86	40	49	13	188
Per cent of adopting house- holds reporting legally adopted children	34.9	27.5	36.7	46.2	34.6
Per cent of adopting house- holds reporting <u>hanai</u> children	51.2	32.5	24.5	32.5	38.8
Per cent of adopting house- holds reporting foster children	39.5	45.0	40.8	30.8	40.4

\* Some households report more than one type of adoption and are represented in the percentage for each type they reported.



Table 4.

		Relationship Between Adopters and Adoptees																
		Nanakuli			Waimanalo			Kewalo			Papakolea			Totals			All types	Percentages
		Legal adoption	Hanai	Fosterage	Legal adoption	Hanai	Fosterage	Legal adoption	Hanai	Fosterage	Legal adoption	Hanai	Fosterage	Legal adoption	Hanai	Fosterage		
<u>Grandchildren</u>																		
SoCh		2	10	9	-	1	3	-	-	2	1	-	-	3	11	14	28	
DaCh		4	19	31	2	13	8	4	6	13	1	-	-	11	38	52	101	
ChCh*		-	-	-	1	1	2	5	-	23	1	4	4	7	5	29	41	
Total Grandchildren		6	29	40	3	15	13	9	6	38	3	4	4	21	54	95	170	(50.6)
<u>Maternal Kin</u>																		
SiCh		6	3	1	-	-	1	1	3	3	1	2	-	8	8	5	21	
BrCh		-	5	-	2	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	4	5	-	9	
MoSiCh		-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	2	
MoBrCh		1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	
FaSiCh		1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	
<u>Others</u>																		
ego's generation		-	-	-	1	-	7	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	7	8	
- 1 generation		-	3	3	-	-	5	2	-	1	-	-	1	2	3	10	15	
- 2 generation		-	-	1	-	-	3	-	-	3	-	1	-	-	1	7	8	
Total maternal kin		8	13	5	3	-	16	5	3	7	1	3	1	17	19	29	65	(19.5)
<u>Paternal Kin</u>																		
SiCh		1	-	2	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	2	5	
BrCh		2	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	1	1	-	6	1	-	7	
FaSiCh		-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	
<u>Others</u>																		
- 1 generation		-	2	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	1	3	-	4	
- 2 generation		-	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	2	
Total paternal kin		3	4	2	1	1	-	4	1	-	2	1	-	10	7	2	19	(5.7)
<u>Relative (linkage unknown)</u>																		
		3	1	4	-	-	-	4	2	1	-	-	-	7	3	5	15	(4.5)
<u>Non-kinsmen</u>																		
Friend		8	7	4	-	1	-	1	1	2	-	-	-	9	9	6	24	
Institution		1	1	3	-	-	4	2	-	-	-	-	-	3	1	7	11	
Unknown		3	4	-	1	1	-	1	1	-	1	1	-	6	7	-	13	
Total non-kinsmen		12	12	7	1	2	4	4	2	2	1	1	-	18	17	13	48	(14.4)
<u>No information</u>																		
		8	1	-	3	-	-	4	1	-	-	-	-	15	2	-	17	(5.1)
<u>Totals</u>																		
		40	60	58	11	18	33	30	15	48	7	9	5	88	102	144	334	

\* Exact linkage is unknown.

Table 5

## Age at which Children are Taken into Household

	<u>Nanakuli</u>	<u>Wai-manalo</u>	<u>Kewalo</u>	<u>Papa-kolea</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Percent-age</u>
<b>Legal adoption</b>						
birth	13	3	5	-	21	25.6
1 week to 6 mos	19	3	15	-	37	45.1
6 mos. to 1 year	2	1	-	5	8	9.8
more than 1 year	6	1	7	2	16	19.5
Total	<u>40</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>82</u>	<u>100.0</u>
<b>Hanai</b>						
birth	20	8	3	-	31	32.3
1 week to 6 mos	19	7	7	4	37	38.5
6 mos to 1 year	9	-	-	2	11	11.5
more than 1 year	7	3	5	2	17	17.7
Total	<u>55</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>96</u>	<u>100.0</u>
<b>Totals*</b>						
birth	33	11	8	-	52	29.2
1 week to 6 mos	38	10	22	4	74	41.6
6 mos to 1 year	11	1	-	7	19	10.7
more than 1 year	13	4	12	4	33	18.5
Total	<u>95</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>42</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>178</u>	<u>100.0</u>

\* Information on the age at which children are taken into the household was not available for children in the fosterage category.



Table 6

## Age Position in Household of Adopted Children at Time of Adoption\*

	<u>Nanakuli</u>	<u>Wai- manalo</u>	<u>Kewalo</u>	<u>Papa- kolea</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Percent- age</u>
Legal Adoption						
Youngest	26	7	28	5	66	77.2
Other	14	3	1	2	20	22.8
Hanai						
Youngest	44	16	10	4	74	83.1
Other	13	-	2	-	15	16.9
Fosterage						
Youngest	38	21	37	3	99	68.8
Other	20	12	11	2	45	31.2
Total						
Youngest	108	44	75	12	239	74.9
Other	47	15	14	4	80	25.1

\* If more than one adopted child was in a household, they were treated separately if not occupying adjacent age positions. If they occupied adjacent age positions (i.e., no other children were of intermediate position between them), they were all scored for the same position. For example, if a household contained two adopted children, ages 8 and 10, and three other children were present in the household, ages 17, 15, and 12, then the adopted children were both counted as youngest.

Table 7

## Sex of Adopted Children

	<u>Nanakuli</u>	<u>Wai- manalo</u>	<u>Kewalo</u>	<u>Papa- kolea</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Percent- age</u>
Legal adoption						
Male	26	7	14	4	51	58.6
Female	14	3	16	3	36	41.4
<u>Hanai</u>						
Male	33	7	7	5	52	51.0
Female	27	11	8	4	50	49.0
Fosterage						
Male	27	18	23	2	70	48.6
Female	31	15	25	3	74	51.4
Total						
Male	86	32	44	11	173	52.0
Female	72	29	49	10	160	48.0



Table 8

Female Adopter's Age at the Time Children were Taken into Household

	<u>Nanakuli</u>	<u>Wai- manalo</u>	<u>Kewalo</u>	<u>Papa- kolea</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Percent- age</u>
Legal adoption						
under 25	4	1	2	2	9	16.4
25-35	6	-	4	-	10	18.2
over 35	18	6	9	3	36	65.5
<u>Hanai</u>						
under 25	2	-	2	1	5	8.1
25-35	10	-	-	-	10	16.1
over 35	27	11	8	1	47	75.8
Fosterage						
under 25	1	1	-	-	2	2.7
25-35	2	3	-	-	5	6.8
over 35	29	13	20	4	66	90.4
Total						
under 25	7	2	4	3	16	8.4
25-35	18	3	4	-	25	13.2
over 35	74	30	37	8	149	78.4