

## A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF FAMILY DEVELOPMENT <sup>1</sup>

Much of the difficulty experienced by Hawaiian families seems to come during early married life. This section of the report is an attempt to portray problems faced by young people in the process of developing their relationship so that it can form the basis of a new family. For many couples the union develops over a period of several years and in the development problems must be overcome if the new family is to continue. Resolution of the problems may take many years, even into middle age for some couples.

The 1967 summer sample of families included only a small number of young couples, and was not a good source of data for our present purpose. The young people we succeeded in interviewing were very likely experiencing less trouble and feeling more in conformity with the public culture than those who avoided the interviewers. Young men were especially difficult to locate and interview. Our other sources of information, public and private agencies to whom families turn for assistance, focus on those families who are having the most difficulty. The picture to be presented draws heavily on agency data; further, women are almost always the main source of information. However, it is our strong impression that the same kinds of difficulties experienced by those who go to agencies are often encountered by families who do not go to agencies.

Our major purpose in drawing this portrait from a selected group of families is to demonstrate the interlocking nature of a number of patterns which are often regarded in isolation. We have employed a developmental narrative to illustrate that such events as children being born to non-legal unions are parts of a distinctive marital pattern and are not necessarily indices of social pathology. In order to gain this more integrated perspective we have run the risk of oversimplification and overgeneralization. We wish to emphasize again that our account is not true of every family in Nanakuli, or even of every family with problems. It is best, perhaps, to think of what we present here as a set of hypotheses.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the husband-wife relationship is the definition of the husband's social identity. A husband is judged in terms of his ability to provide. However, the records consistently indicate this to be an expectation rather than a reality during the early years of union. In many cases during these years the husband is unemployed or enjoys little job stability; almost without exception his first jobs will be unskilled, low paying and uncertain (see "Employment"). During this time the husband usually continues close ties with his peers and, as a consequence, spends considerable time away from home. From the wife's view these conditions indicate a lack of commitment and involvement in the family, to which she responds with efforts to socialize her

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husband into the role of provider. Very often she is aided by her kinsmen in this task. For the husband the shift in commitment from the peer group to the family is neither easily nor readily accomplished, nor are there any guarantees he will pass successfully through this difficult transition. As we shall attempt to illustrate, many of the male's early family experiences are at odds with the demands of his prescribed role of husband/provider.

During infancy there is no apparent distinction made in terms of the amount of attention and indulgence afforded male and female children. However, during early and middle childhood, male offspring are dealt with in a substantially different fashion than their female siblings. Customarily, the tasks assigned to boys lie outside the house, are less essential to family routine than those assigned to girls, and are nearly always less closely supervised. Girls' duties, on the other hand, are more specific and typically involve essential household chores. Supervision is more immediate and the rewards more explicit as well as more frequent, because the tasks assigned are important and prestigious, and adequate performance is readily apparent. For boys there is more freedom but less responsibility and, as a consequence, less involvement; jobs are apt to be "cleaning the yard," or "picking up the rubbish." Thus the boy has fewer opportunities than his sisters to deal directly and verbally with individuals who exercise authority and demand responsibility.

The peers offer companionship and recreation and little pressure to be responsible or compliant. Often a boy will risk punishment by skipping chores in order to be with peers, partly because he knows his jobs are nonessential. Because he is not closely supervised (perhaps the father is seldom at home or does not support the mother's authority), a boy may avoid punishment altogether. Further, both mothers and fathers often "forget" to punish a child if he is not present at the time his infraction is discovered. Thus, going off with peers may be a useful escape from punishment as well as a source of satisfactions not available elsewhere. This tactic of avoidance continues to be utilized for his single years and is an important factor in our analysis of young men's behavior in the early years of marriage. In general, verbal tactics of conflict resolution are not acquired; situations and individuals which are associated with conflict and confrontation are dealt with by placing physical distance between oneself and them. In the early years of marriage this formerly very functional tactic is perceived by the wife as a problem.

A main feature of a man's early life is minimal responsibility. In addition, the behaviors he has learned are not useful in fulfilling the role of a provider in the adult world. In school, if he is fortunate enough to finish high school, he may have learned some attitudes as well as skills which may be fruitfully brought to bear on his family commitment as an adult. However, school experience is unlikely to overcome the avoidance tactics which he has perfected over the years at home. These tactics, which he uses as adjustive behaviors, and his reliance on the peer group will be most important in seeing him through the crises which



begin after marriage

For the young female child the withdrawal of nurturance and the father's secondary role as a parent appear to have a less dramatic effect. There are other ways of integrating a daughter into the family, e.g., by means of the work that she does. She is groomed quite early to take on an increasing burden of domestic responsibility. The early tasks usually involve general household chores and babysitting with younger siblings.

As a girl reaches early teens she is not only proficient at most domestic tasks, but plays a role in making payments of bills, purchasing groceries, and so forth. She also participates in organizing the duties of her younger siblings, thus acting as an exemplary model for them and transmitting what she has acquired by imitating the mother. In the process she not only learns a set of responsibilities which can be directly transferred to her adult role, but she also learns to deal with verbal confrontation which results from sibling and family feuds. She is supported in her role as assistant housewife not only by the mother (at times by the father), but also by kin who either live in the home or visit it regularly.

Mother-daughter conflict typically centers around two areas, the first of which occurs when the daughter complains of being overburdened with housework and its concomitant responsibilities. In some cases daughters assume nearly all the role functions and responsibilities of the housewife, while the mother contributes by supplementing the father's cash earnings with wages from an outside job or takes a less active supervisory role.

Dating, selection of boy friends, and sexual behavior constitute the second source of conflict. While the data clearly indicate that much pressure is aimed at prolonging the status quo and delaying the inevitable steps toward forming a new family, the reasons behind this strategy are more obscure. The parents know that once a sexual alliance is concluded there is a high probability that at least one additional mouth will be added to the family with no guarantee that a new source of support will become available. While the prospect of a grandchild may sometimes be regarded with delight, the potential conflicts over financial issues with the father of the child and his family are a matter of deep concern. Thus, one reason many parents encourage their daughters to continue high school is the hope that they will get good jobs and be able to make some financial contribution if the husband/boy friend they choose is a poor "provider." However, this bargain requires that the girls be permitted to seek relief from the responsibilities of housework in order to become involved in activities outside the home. This, in turn, may be seen by the parents as increasing the chances of a daughter's early marriage or pregnancy. If the parents are overly strict and demand that their daughters always stay at home, rebellion is likely to be manifested in early escape through marriage or pregnancy. Thus, while the parents seem to feel that marriage and motherhood are inevitable, at least by shortly after high

school, there does seem to be some effort to shape the economic assets the daughter will have when it does occur

One apparently ineffective and often self-defeating approach used by the parents is negative exemplary models. In vivid terms for the daughter's consumption, the parent describes the woes of married life and the foibles of the male sex. However, the more a mother complains about and criticizes daughter's boy friend, the more attractive he becomes.

There seems to be no consistent pattern which girls follow--some leave their mother's household to live with the boy friend and in other cases he takes up residence in the girl's home. In either case, the girl's family appears to cast judgment on the boy and exert pressure on her during the choice and not after the decision is made. Apparently the couple goes to live with the family which offered the least resistance to their union. It is exceedingly rare for a couple to have their own home from the beginning of the union. If both families are displeased and inhospitable, the couple may try to set up a separate household, which is often maintained only until one of the families relents and accepts the union.

It is a distinct feature that group or family membership is not violated by sexual activity which is part of a relationship that the young couple intend to be or portray as permanent; in only a few cases has a daughter been told to leave the household for this reason. Ordinarily, if she leaves, it is of her own volition and not by request. Pregnancy often occurs prior to legal marriage, but this pattern is part of the manner in which Hawaiian marital unions are commenced, rather than an expression of promiscuity. For the present it is sufficient to say that these unions, while they do not necessarily begin with a written, legal contract and on a certain day, have all the essential features of the marriage relationship. What distinguishes these unions is the ambiguous demarcation of courtship and union. From the male point of view, this might be termed "backing into marriage," as he is gradually drawn away from his male peers. As the involvement grows and extends to sexual intercourse and to the birth of a child, the girl increases pressure on the boy to assume the role of provider. Although legal marriage can occur at any point in the sequence, it seems to play only a minor part in cementing the union.

The older generation is a source of financial and emotional support for the young female as she attempts to persuade her boy friend/spouse to assume responsibility for her by seeking a steady job. She functions as mother to her child, a role for which she has been well prepared, and encourages the father's interest in the infant, or complains if he shows no concern. As the child (sometimes children) grows beyond the age of coddling and is regarded as needing less care and more discipline, the mother assumes the role of disciplinarian in a forceful and authoritarian manner. The mother now discourages the father from active participation in the child-rearing role and sees him as likely either to overreact and harm the child, or to be too lenient. At any rate she tries to



convince him that his function as a loving father is to provide money for support. Since the community defines those who support a child as its lawful parents, the supporting role of the kin may serve as an additional challenge to the father to seek steady employment in order to maintain some decision-making role in relation to his offspring. Inability to function properly as a "father-provider" can signify failure as a husband, whereas inability to function as a consistent "father-disciplinarian" will go relatively unnoticed.

The wife also appears to use sex, particularly the suspension of sexual privileges, as a means of pressuring the husband to provide for her and the children. She may threaten to leave him and to take the children and return to her kin, or to throw him out if he should fall short as a husband.

The young male may have many false starts in meeting his new responsibilities; he may change jobs six or eight times and experience frequent short periods of unemployment. These difficult times are often endured with the aid of the wife's family, or of an older, more financially stable member of his own family. At times his workmates provide relief during economic crises if he has established reciprocal obligations with them. As a consequence of the obligations he contracts by accepting assistance from others, the process of becoming a provider increases the pressures on him. His wife, her family and perhaps his family will not allow him to forget what they have done for him, or what they expect of him.

Initially in his marriage, he is likely to employ the avoidance tactics he developed in his youth and to turn to the peer group. With friends and/or workmates, he establishes reciprocal financial and emotional obligations on which he will rely during periods of intense conflict with his wife and her family. Often he is threatened with being "kicked out" by his wife, or he threatens to leave (essentially to seek a "cooling off" period). At such times, friends may provide a place to stay or short-term financial assistance. He may return to his parents' household during these periods of conflict. At other times his insistence on going home to his relatives to drink and "talk story" brings him into conflict with his wife.

As his family grows, the pressures increase for him to become more stable occupationally, to make more consistent financial contributions, and to spend more time at home. Because many of his peers are also under pressure from their wives, his peer group becomes a less dependable resource, and the "pull" toward the wife and the new family becomes relatively stronger.

In most cases wives seem to handle financial affairs, although there are instances of husbands who do so successfully, as well as those whose management has been disastrous. In any case the control exercised by wives, when combined with the minimal resources available, limit the extent to which the husband may continue to participate in peer activities and as a consequence diminish his chances for building supportive

relationships outside the family Hawaiian men often cosign loans for friends as part of their informal exchange of assistance, and this is something the wife cannot effectively prevent. Cosigning a loan may meet his obligation to friends when he has no other assets to offer. Although wives often indicate disapproval of these arrangements, emphasizing the resulting hardships, there is little evidence of such behavior creating severe marital discord; indeed wives generally feel equally obligated to meet debts incurred by their husbands in this fashion. However, if cosigning of loans significantly diminishes the husband's effectiveness as a provider, that is, if his salary is garnisheed so heavily that he cannot support his family, then the wife and kin will increase their pressure on him. It may be, however, that only a small percentage of the total number of men who cosign loans get into difficulty and thus come to the attention of the agencies

Job stability is frequently affected in the early years of marriage by the husband's inability to tolerate confrontation with "authority figures" over job responsibility. The records suggest that many of the young men quit or are "laid off" as the result of misunderstandings with supervisors--for example, not reporting for work because of illness or conflicting obligations and neglecting to notify the employer in advance

In time, job experience and the acquisition of skills combine with social pressure at home to mold the husband into an increasingly responsible worker. It is clear, once the initial hurdles are passed, many men take great pleasure in their work, a factor which hastens their transition into the role of a stable provider (see "Employment"). As job stability becomes a reality, several important developments take place. The importance of peers begins to diminish, at least in terms of their support function during periods of marital conflict; many friendships, established previous to achieving provider status, may continue, although these relationships are now much more likely to include wives. And, not surprisingly, job stability is also accompanied by reductions in pressure exerted by the wife and relatives

As the husband's ties with the peer group decrease in importance and he begins to assume a more active role in the family, both the wife and the children appear to resist his efforts in this direction, since he usually seeks to fill a disciplinary role after having exercised little or no authority in the past. For the man, an active authoritarian role may provide a meaningful substitute for his loss of peer-related activities. As the father exerts authority, the children turn to the mother, who, in turn, feels her position as household head is threatened. Thus, in order to enter the household, the husband must be willing to play a relatively passive role, and to accept considerably more direction from his wife than he ever tolerated previously. In the process he forms an economic alliance with his wife, which, while it spells the end to the peer group commitment, enhances his status and involvement in the family. Once this point is reached, the union is likely to survive, to become increasingly stable, and begin to provide support for younger



couples.

In many cases, male drinking is advanced as a cause of domestic strife; however, this may not be true in fact. In the first place, for younger men drinking is closely tied to the amount of time spent with the peer group. Thus the wife who complains about her husband's drinking may be concerned about his absence from the family and the consequent drain on family finances which his affiliation with the peer group requires. Further, we have no evidence that many women object strenuously to drinking if it is done at home. In fact, wife approval of home drinking, sometimes including friends and workmates, is one of the compensations gained by husbands when they form an alliance with their spouses. But from the point of view of the wife, this is not quite as good as when the husband stops drinking altogether.

It must be kept in mind that prior to the achievement of job stability and marital stability, marriages have endured many problems and some do not survive. If divorce occurs (which it does for a large number), the specific reasons are often quite unclear, although the data suggest that marriages are easily fractured by direct confrontations between husband and wife. These confrontations frequently center around apparently minor issues, such as matters of discipline. In general, the difficulties that are reported to be the causes of separation and divorce seem very similar to the problems encountered by couples who do not dissolve their relationship. What brings a husband and wife to the point of a confrontation which ends in divorce is thus not a matter for which we can offer a generalized account. One point does seem certain--if the husband is a good provider, the wife is very unlikely to seek a divorce for any reason.