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8. Aspects of Self-Esteem among Hawaiian-Americans of the Parental Generation

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Introduction

The data on which this paper is based were collected during the summer of 1967 from 88 households in a Hawaiian Homestead community. The community (to which we have given the pseudonym 'Aina Pumehana) is located on the leeward side of Oahu, approximately thirty miles from Honolulu.

'Aina Pumehana is one of several homesteads established under the provisions of the Hawaiian Homestead Act of 1920. To acquire a lease on homestead land, individuals are required to demonstrate that they are 50 percent or more Hawaiian (i.e., Polynesian-Hawaiian) by genealogical descent. Lessees are entitled to a plot of land ranging from $\frac{1}{4}$ to 1 acre at a cost of \$1.00 per year. They are also eligible for low-interest home-building and home-improvement loans. In 1965, when we began our research, 394 lots were occupied; our sample thus represents slightly less than one-fourth of the families in the community.

From a socioeconomic point of view, 'Aina Pumehana may be characterized as a working-class community. The majority of men are employed in semiskilled or skilled blue-collar occupations, many of them commuting to Honolulu and its environs daily. A substantial minority of women also are employed. Unemployment rates in the community are generally higher than statewide averages, and median income is comparatively low. The community is, in fact, part of a wider area that has been designated "economically depressed" accord-

ing to the standards of the state and federal governments, and over the past few years it has been the target for several remedial programs, including those under the Economic Opportunity Act and the Model Cities Program.

Although lessees may be married to persons of less than 50 percent Hawaiian ancestry, the community is heavily weighted toward Hawaiian ethnicity and manifests a life-style that strongly reflects traditional Hawaiian values. Of paramount importance in the modal life-style is an emphasis on affiliative values and a devaluation of behavior directed toward raising one's prestige vis-a-vis others. Although kinship ranking is important within family groupings, egalitarian pressures are very strong between nonkinsmen, and informal sanctions are brought to bear on those who flaunt their achievements or who seek public recognition. "We are like crabs in a basket," our informants frequently told us, "As soon as one begins to crawl out the others reach up to pull him back." Generosity and reciprocal exchange are normative values. This results in a dispersal of resources even during times when money is scarce and is one of the major reasons why Hawaiian-Americans find it difficult to accumulate material capital. *The norm is to invest resources in social capital rather than to conserve.* It is reflected in a high frequency of large-scale feasts, social gatherings, and numerous other group-oriented activities. It is reflected negatively in a low level of concern for such status symbols as ostentatious housing or prestige automobiles. There are plenty of automobiles in the community but no Cadillacs or Lincolns, in contrast to many "ghetto" communities on the Mainland. In addition to traditional feasts, or *luaus*, the strength of Hawaiian heritage within the community is reflected in a high incidence of adoption (see Howard et al., 1970) and in practices and beliefs related to the treatment of illness (Heighton, 1971). However, 'Aina Pumehana is also very much a part of the modern sociopolitical system that is the United States and, more immediately, the state of Hawaii. It is therefore best to characterize the community, and most of its residents, as Hawaiian-American.

The Study

Research in 'Aina Pumehana was carried out over a three-year period between 1965 and 1968. It was an interdisciplinary effort involving primarily social anthropology and psychology but including researchers from several other disciplines as well. During the initial phases of the research, information was gathered by participant observation and open-ended interviewing. In addition, under the supervision of Dr. Ronald Gallimore, a series of social-psychological experiments was carried out in the local school to clarify developmental processes behind Hawaiian-American character-formation. It was not until two years of such work had been carried out that we constructed a set of questionnaires by which to gather systematic data on a representative sample of adults in the community.

Included in the interview package were questionnaires pertaining to the household's: (1) genealogy, (2) demographic history, (3) social relations with friends, relatives, and outside organizations, (4) role relations, (5) child-rearing

attitudes and behavior, (6) diet and health practices, (7) employment and economic management, (8) exposure to and identification with Hawaiian, middle-class American, and other cultural traditions, (9) selected personal attitudes, including those relating to self-esteem, and (10) strategy orientations, i.e., the inclination to favor certain ways of dealing with problems rather than others. Data were also obtained on men's drinking behavior and on conflict within the household. Additional measures were provided by interviewer ratings of the household along a number of dimensions relating to its physical and social ecology. Finally, each household was scored on its social and economic problems based on data obtained from several social agencies.

Dr. Ronald Gallimore, my psychologist collaborator on the project, suggested the inclusion of an adaptation of the Rosenbaum and de Charms Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenbaum and de Charms, 1960), along with adaptations of the Crowne-Marlowe Social Desirability Scale (Crowne and Marlowe, 1964) and the Rotter Locus of Control Scale (Rotter, 1966). I argued strongly against using such standardized measures since the language used in these questionnaires appeared too complicated to be understood by our subjects. I thought it would confuse and possibly disconcert them and might interfere with other parts of the interview. I finally agreed to include them out of deference to my colleague's feelings, but on the condition that they be given last, after the rest of the interview was completed. Even after interviewing experience showed that our subjects were willing to answer the questions, I remained dubious about their validity. However, after working with the data for well over a year now, I admit that I was wrong. While I would still be skeptical about making comparisons between Hawaiian-Americans and other ethnic groups on the basis of such data, I am now convinced that these measures did differentiate within our sample population along the dimensions they were supposed to. The three measures so consistently related to other variables in a theoretically compelling fashion that I found it difficult to dismiss their significance.

The following analysis of our findings focuses upon two basic questions: (1) What types of variables are the main determinants of self-esteem among Hawaiian-Americans? and (2) To what extent is self-esteem a determinant of the overall social-psychological adaptation of Hawaiian-Americans?

Our field experience provided mixed clues. For example, we frequently heard people in the community remark negatively about their own Hawaiian-ness. "We Hawaiians are too stupid to get along in this world; we give everything away that others sell," was the gist of numerous comments. More simply, when a person failed at a task or behaved in an embarrassing manner, a fellow Hawaiian-American could be counted on to say something like, "What do you expect from a dumb Hawaiian?" We therefore thought it possible that Hawaiian-Americans had incorporated the negative stereotype held by members of other ethnic groups into their own group image. On an individual basis this might lead to a lessened sense of self-esteem among persons who consider themselves Hawaiians. But at other times persons expressed a definite sense of pride in their Hawaiian heritage. When people said of someone, "He has a Hawaiian heart," they were both praising the individual for his generosity and extolling a Hawaiian

cultural value. Is it possible that the people in 'Aina Pūmehana do take pride in their Hawaiian ethnicity, and that the self-effacement implicit in critical or sarcastic comments is more a matter of social form than substance? The impact of exposure to *Haole* (Caucasian) culture also seemed to be ambiguous. On the one hand, knowledge of *Haole* cultural patterns appeared to contribute to a sense of social competence and self-esteem; on the other hand, negative stereotypes of *Haoles* were legion in the community. We hoped that by examining the relationship between some of our ethnic and cultural measures and scores on the Self-Esteem Scale we could clarify the impact of ethnicity on sense of self-worth.

A second clue suggested by field work had to do with role performance. It became clear to us from the very beginning that men were evaluated most strongly in their role as providers for their families, and on their job competence. To be a good provider is nearly synonymous with being a successful father and husband, no matter what other flaws a man might have, and prestige among men outside the family is very much a function of a man's occupational skills and control of resources. Without resources a man is hard-pressed to engage in the kinds of reciprocal exchange that are at the heart of social relations in 'Aina Pūmehana. If this were in fact the case, we would expect self-esteem to be associated with men's occupational and economic circumstances. For women the central role is that of mother and, later in life, grandmother. As men are evaluated primarily on their competence as providers, women are evaluated largely on the degree to which they care for and supervise their children. But since the markers of successful role performance are much less obvious for women, we were unsure of what to predict. Several variables related to women's role performance were included in our questionnaires, but nothing as direct as a man's occupational status or income.

In analyzing our statistical data, we chose to treat all measures categorically. Categories were arrived at either intuitively (on the basis of ethnographic observations concerning sociocultural relevance or theoretical predictions), or, in the case of scaled items such as the Self-Esteem Scale, on the basis of distributional qualities. We freely played with distributions of correlated variables to obtain "optimal" cut-off points, i.e., such that persons scoring above a certain point consistently differed in their responses to a series of other measures from persons scoring below that point. If no such "natural" breakpoint emerged from the analysis, we constructed arbitrary categories of high and low based on medians, or high, intermediate, and low based on approximately equal distribution.

In categorizing the results of the Self-Esteem Scale, we utilized the latter technique. Scores on the Self-Esteem Scale ranged between 24 and 64, with a low score indicating low self-esteem and a high score high self-esteem. After examining the distribution, we decided to divide the sample into the following three categories: low self-esteem (24-39), intermediate self-esteem (40-44), and high self-esteem (45-64) (see Table 1). It should be understood that these categories are only for comparative purposes and are not meant to be clinical evaluations. Since the contingencies affecting men and women are somewhat different, they are treated separately in the following analysis.

Table 1: Levels of Self-Esteem As Inferred from Distribution of Self-Esteem Scores

Level of Self-Esteem	Score*	Men	Women
Low	20-24	0	1
	25-29	0 (27.1%)	2 (34.6%)
	30-34	6	6
	35-39	10	19
Intermediate	40-44	20 (33.9%)	20 (24.7%)
High	45-49	14	17
	50-54	4	9
	55-59	4 (39.0%)	6 (40.7%)
	60-64	1	1
	Mean	43.5	43.1
	Median	43	43

*On the Rosenbaum and de Charms Self-Esteem Scale

Findings

MEN

The most striking finding for men is the degree to which economic, and particularly occupational, variables appear to affect self-esteem. Three of them that we used as measures are occupation, income, and ambitiousness. Table 2 shows the distribution of men with high, intermediate, and low self-esteem in relation to these variables. As a result of unemployment, and because a higher proportion of the men with skilled occupations are retired, occupation and income are essentially independent of one another. When their interaction is considered, the effect of socioeconomic status on self-esteem is even more pronounced (see Table 3). Using modes as a reference, the data suggest that high self-esteem for a man in 'Aina Pūmehana is associated with having a skilled occupation or higher and a relatively high income; intermediate self-esteem is associated with a semiskilled occupation and high income; and low self-esteem results from being unskilled regardless of income, or being skilled or semiskilled and having a low income. As might be expected, ambitiousness, which was measured on the basis of expressed desire for occupational improvement, is negatively associated with occupation; i.e., the lower a man's occupation the more ambitious he is likely to be, and vice versa. With occupation controlled, ambitiousness loses its effect. We may therefore conclude that a man's current socioeconomic status primarily determines his sense of self-worth, and that that status is partly a function of the degree of discrepancy between ideal status and current reality.

Table 2: Relation of Self-Esteem and Economic Characteristics of Men

Characteristic	Self-Esteem		
	High	Intermediate	Low
Occupation			
Skilled or higher	11 (50.0%)	7 (31.8%)	4 (18.2%)
Semiskilled	10 (34.5%)	12 (41.4%)	7 (24.1%)
Unskilled	2 (25.0%)	1 (12.5%)	5 (62.5%)
Income			
\$350 or more/month	15 (41.7%)	15 (41.7%)	6 (16.7%)
Less than \$350/month	6 (30.0%)	4 (20.0%)	10 (50.0%)
Ambitiousness*			
Low	8 (53.3%)	4 (26.7%)	3 (20.0%)
High	11 (36.0%)	12 (33.3%)	13 (30.6%)

*Measured by expressed desire for occupational improvement.

Table 3: Relation of Men's Self-Esteem with Combined Occupation and Income

Occupation and Income	Self-Esteem		
	High	Intermediate	Low
Skilled occupation, high income	7 (70.0%)	3 (30.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Semiskilled occupation, high income	7 (33.3%)	11 (52.4%)	3 (14.3%)
Skilled occupation, low income	3 (30.0%)	3 (30.0%)	4 (40.0%)
Semiskilled occupation, low income	3 (37.5%)	1 (12.5%)	4 (50.0%)
Unskilled occupation, high income	1 (20.0%)	1 (20.0%)	3 (60.0%)
Unskilled occupation, low income	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (100.0%)

Only one of our six ethnic or cultural measures showed a relationship to men's self-esteem.¹ This was the degree to which subjects reported feeling "influenced" by Haole culture. Since the actual command of Haole cultural concepts, as measured by our Middle-Class Conceptual Test, showed no effect, we conclude that Hawaiian-American men associate a sense of economic competence (rather than social, legal, political, and medical competence) with Haole culture.

Men's self-esteem scores were also found to be associated with their scores on Rotter's Locus of Control Scale and the Crowne-Marlowe Social Desirability Scale. The more a man felt his destiny to be under his own control and the less he felt it was determined by external factors such as luck, the higher his sense of self-worth. Likewise, the more a man showed a concern for the approval of his fellows (as measured by the Crowne-Marlowe Scale), the higher his sense of self-esteem.

Finally, a cluster of social structural variables showed some relationship to the dependent variable. Men with fewer than four children in their household, those who expressed a sense of closeness with kinsmen, and those who attend church more often scored higher than the others on the self-esteem measure.

WOMEN

Ethnic and cultural variables appear far more significant for women than they do for men. Virtually every one of those measures relate to women's self-esteem (see Table 4). At first glance, however, a minor paradox appears. In general, the greater a woman's Hawaiian ethnicity—as recorded in the Hawaiian Homes Commission files, by spouse's description, and by self-identification—the lower her self-esteem is likely to be. Yet on our Hawaiian Conceptual Test, women with low self-esteem were far more likely to score low. This suggests that many of the individuals who are identified ethnically as Hawaiians are in fact dissociated from their Hawaiian heritage, and that it is this dissociation, rather than their Hawaiian ancestry, that contributes to their low self-esteem. A knowledge of and identification with Haole cultural patterns contributes to a positive sense of self-worth, but the pattern is clearest when the effects of competence in both Hawaiian and Haole cultures are combined (see Table 5). The data strongly suggest that Haole cultural competence, as measured by the Middle Class Conceptual Test, is nearly a sufficient condition for high self-esteem among 'Aina Pumehana women. In the absence of such competence, a good knowledge of Hawaiian culture, as measured by the Hawaiian Conceptual Test, appears sufficient to prevent a low self-estimate. Women with competence in neither culture overwhelmingly show a tendency to self-denigration. Whereas for Hawaiian-American men overall cultural competence appears to be subordinate to competence in the role of provider, for women it is of critical significance.

Several other correlates of self-esteem among 'Aina Pumehana women are consistent with the above pattern. Women who have completed a high school education and those in clerical occupations tend to have higher self-esteem than those with less education and with lower status or no occupation. Also, women who prefer to cope with problems by confronting them show a higher self-appraisal than those favoring avoidance. All three of these variables are associated with competence in the public (i.e., Haole) culture and relate in the expected way to self-esteem. That control of economic resources is of relevance for women as well as men is suggested by the finding that a woman's self-esteem is more likely to be high if her husband's salary is over \$350 per month.

Two other sets of variables appear to be relevant. One is general anxiety level; the other pertains to social milieu. Women expressing high anxiety on the Cornell Medical Index and our Approach Anxiety Scale (based on degree of

Table 4: Relation of Women's Self-Esteem with Various Ethnic and Cultural Variables

Variable	Self-Esteem		
	High	Intermediate	Low
Percent Hawaiian			
Ethnicity:			
0-75	17 (41.5%)	14 (34.1%)	10 (24.4%)
76-100	11 (39.3%)	4 (14.3%)	13 (46.4%)
Ethnic description by			
Spouse:			
Hawaiian or Hawaiian-			
other	22 (40.7%)	9 (16.7%)	23 (42.6%)
Other-Hawaiian or			
Other	6 (46.2%)	7 (53.8%)	0 (0.0%)
Middle-Class Conceptual			
Test:			
0-10 correct	21 (33.9%)	18 (29.0%)	23 (37.1%)
11-20 correct	11 (68.8%)	1 (6.3%)	4 (25.0%)
Hawaiian Conceptual			
Test:			
0-5 correct	8 (28.6%)	4 (14.3%)	16 (57.1%)
6-9 correct	6 (42.9%)	2 (14.3%)	6 (42.9%)
10-20 correct	21 (46.7%)	14 (31.1%)	10 (22.2%)
Hawaiian			
self-identity:			
Low/Intermediate	14 (48.3%)	5 (17.2%)	10 (34.5%)
High	19 (37.3%)	15 (29.4%)	17 (33.3%)
Haole self-identity:			
Low	18 (36.7%)	11 (22.4%)	20 (40.8%)
Intermediate/High	15 (48.4%)	9 (29.0%)	7 (22.6%)

Table 5: Relation of Women's Self-Esteem with Combined Scores on Middle-Class Conceptual Test (MCCT) and Hawaiian Conceptual Test (HCT)

Score	Self-Esteem		
	High	Intermediate	Low
High score MCCT, any score HCT	11 (68.8%)	1 (6.3%)	4 (25.0%)
Low score MCCT, high score HCT	14 (42.4%)	12 (36.4%)	7 (21.2%)
Low score MCCT, low/intermediate score HCT	2 (9.5%)	4 (19.0%)	15 (71.4%)

nervousness reported when facing authority figures) were more likely to be self-depreciative. Whether this is cause, effect, or the common result of similar antecedents is not clear at the present stage of analysis. Self-esteem scores for women relate to social milieu in the same general way as do men's. Women with high self-esteem tend to express a greater sense of closeness with kinsmen on our Social Distance Scale. Like the men, they tend to be from smaller households with fewer children. Other evidence suggests that they are more kin-oriented and less friend-oriented than women with low self-esteem.

Having outlined what appear to be the main determinants of self-esteem for residents of 'Aina Pūmehana, we can now ask, To what extent is self-esteem a determinant of the overall social-psychological adaptation of Hawaiian-Americans? We have already reported that low self-esteem in women is associated with high anxiety, but to what degree does low self-esteem contribute to the occurrence of intrafamilial conflict or visible social problems (i.e., those brought to the attention of public or private agencies)? The answer, if our data are to be taken at face value, is "very little." While men and women showing low self-esteem report slightly more conflict and have somewhat more social problems, the differences are slight and tend to cancel out when other factors are considered. Thus, we might conclude that although Hawaiian-Americans may suffer anxiety and no doubt anguish when their self-respect is under assault, this in itself does not prevent them from making adequate adjustments to societal demands.

NOTE

- I. Those included: (1) percent Hawaiian ethnicity, as reported to the Hawaiian Homes Commission, (2) ethnic description by spouse (Hawaiian, Hawaiian-Other, Other-Hawaiian, Other), (3) Hawaiian conceptual Test, (4) Middle-Class Conceptual Test, (5) Hawaiian self-identity (degree to which a person reported feeling "influenced" by Hawaiian culture), and (6) Haole self-identity (degree to which a person reported feeling "influenced" by Haole culture). For a description of the instruments used to measure these variables, see Howard, 1974.

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