

7.5 INDEPENDENCE TRAINING AMONG HAWAIIANS: A CROSS- CULTURAL STUDY

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This report is based on a portion of the data collected during an investigation of Hawaiians of Polynesian ancestry on the Island of Oahu during 1965-1966. From these initial efforts a set of hypotheses was constructed to account for the social and psychological characteristics of the Hawaiian subculture. The second phase of the project, currently in progress, involves systematic testing of these hypotheses. This report presents some of the preliminary findings on child rearing and socialization obtained during the testing period.

Racially and ethnically, Americans of Hawaiian descent are best considered part Hawaiian. Virtually all have some Hawaiian ancestry but few, if any, can be considered "pure" Hawaiians. Most identify themselves as Hawaiian-other combinations, the other usually being Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Portuguese, Korean, Puerto Rican, or Haole (i.e., Caucasian). They speak a colloquial dialect of English, often described as "pidgin," which includes some words from Hawaiian as well as a few from other languages. Hawaiian is spoken by a minority, most of whom are elderly; in general, familiarity with the old culture has been substantially eroded. There is, however, a distinct Hawaiian subculture, particularly in those areas set aside as the

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Hawaiians' homelands. One of these areas, Aina Pumehana,¹ is the focus of our research.

The ethnographic study strongly suggests that Hawaiian mothers are indulgent of infants and toddlers to the point of fostering extreme dependency. After a child has become mobile and verbal, or the next child is born, mothers grow weary of the burdensome dependency which previously was encouraged and in which they had taken pleasure. The child's overtures are increasingly punished and he is forced to rely more often on his own efforts or the capricious aid of older children. The child initially responds with redoubled efforts to secure the once plentiful nurturance—predictably, the response of the mother is punitive and rejecting.

Although the Hawaiian mother discourages and punishes dependency, she does not, so it appears, reward independence. With time, independent behavior is acquired but is limited to those responses which the child finds gratifying but do not provoke the mother. The Hawaiian child becomes independent, therefore, not because his mother rewards self-sufficiency but because she punishes him when he fails to meet her expectations or because he has no alternative means of securing gratification except through independent action. Therefore, the most salient feature of Hawaiian independence training is the withdrawal of nurturance coupled with the active punishment of dependency demands.

On the basis of the ethnographic data it was predicted that Hawaiian mothers would expect independence earlier than Haole mothers. The anticipation of a Haole-Hawaiian difference was based on two pieces of information: (1) Hawaiian children, in contrast to Haole children, are notoriously indifferent scholars at all grade levels and seem genuinely independent of the performance-reward contingencies typically employed by teachers, and (2) Chance (1961) has shown that poor first-grade achievement is related to early pressure for independence.

STUDY 1

In the first study, 32 Hawaiian mothers responded to the pressure-for-independence questionnaire originally developed by Winterbottom (1958) and expanded by Chance (1961). The mother is asked to give the age at which she expects children to perform competently

¹ Aina Pumehana is a pseudonym.

each of 28 tasks. Tasks include, for example, eating alone, playing outdoors, staying home alone, trying hard tasks without asking for help, and so forth.

Table 1 *Distribution of Hawaiian-Haole Differences in Expected Age of Task Competence* (Original 20-Item Winterbottom Scale)*

Number of items Hawaiian mothers expecting earlier independence	16 (80%)
Number of items no difference between Hawaiian and Haole mothers	2 (10%)
Number of items Haole mothers expecting earlier independence	2 (10%)

* $\chi^2 = 19.59; p < .001.$

The overall median age obtained for each item from the Hawaiian group was contrasted with comparable data for 52 middle-income Haole mothers reported by Chance (1961). The results are entirely consistent with expectation. On 80 per cent of items from the original Winterbottom scale, the median age for the Hawaiian mothers was at least one year under the age reported for Haole mothers. Comparisons made with the Chance revision and a Hawaii revision² also yielded differences of significant magnitude. The obtained chi squares were significant at the .001, .01, and .02 levels of significance for the three scales respectively.

These findings reinforce the field observations of the ethnographic study and are consistent with preliminary analysis of a recently completed set of Sears-type (Sears, Rau, & Alpert, 1966) mother interviews. Whether this Hawaiian-Haole difference can be attributed to ethnic variables is problematic at this stage of the research—here, as in other studies of the ethnic poor (Gallimore & Howard, 1967), the inevitable confounding of social and cultural variables is present.

In this instance, it is plausible that early independence pressure among the mothers in our Hawaiian sample had a cultural origin but is presently maintained by socioeconomic factors. Studies of child-rearing practices among low-income mainland U. S. groups (Sears, Maccoby, & Levin, 1957) support a socioeconomic explanation of the Hawaiian-Haole difference. Poverty may press mothers to expect early independence both on the mainland and in Hawaii.

² The Hawaii Scale excluded items which Hawaiian mothers found unusual.

STUDY 2

The combination of independence pressure, nurturance withdrawal, and punitiveness for dependency ought to produce dependency inhibited children. That is, Hawaiian children ought to be more reluctant to seek adult assistance than Haole children.

In the second study, measures of dependency inhibition were obtained from 27 Hawaiian children and 14 Haole children. The Hawaiian children were from low-income families and were members of the prekindergarten Headstart program. The Haole children were attending a private preschool in a middle-income community in Hawaii and were from middle-class families. Ages ranged from 3-0 to 5-2 with the Haole median at 4-7 and the Hawaiian median at 4-5.³

*Table 2 Distribution of Hawaiian and Haole Children Asking and Not Asking for Help**

	Asking for Help	Not Asking for Help	Persisting
Hawaiian	7 (25.9%)	17 (62.9%)	3 (11.2%)
Haole	13 (92.8%)	0	1 (7.2%)

* $\chi^2 = 14.23$; $p < .001$.

Each child was asked to solve a puzzle which pretesting had shown to be too difficult for children under 7. The child was first shown the assembled puzzle (consisting of nine pieces of wood, forming a three-dimensional rectangle) and given a demonstration on how to proceed. The child was told "go ahead and play with the puzzle and if you want me to help you, just ask and we will play with it together. This is a very hard puzzle." The injunction to ask for help was repeated immediately after the child began to work. Time spent working was recorded as well as notes on the child's behavior. If the child stopped working and did not ask for help, *E* waited one minute and offered help. A ten-minute time limit was imposed.

The data are unambiguous. Ninety-three per cent of the Haole group spontaneously asked for assistance. In contrast, only 26 per cent of the Hawaiian children requested aid while 63 per cent stopped working, but did not ask for help. The Hawaiian nonasker typically

³ The Haole group was significantly older which weighs in favor of the findings since dependency has generally been found to decrease with age.

worked with interest and attention for three to four minutes, followed by a gradual decrease in activity. After ceasing to work, the nonasker often appeared apprehensive and uncomfortable. The askers, in both groups, tended to stop work abruptly after three to four minutes and ask for help in a clearly and openly dependent fashion.

There were no significant age or sex differences between askers and nonaskers for the Hawaiian group. Eleven per cent and 7 per cent of the Hawaiian and Haole children, respectively, worked steadily for the ten-minute period without stopping and without asking for help: the difference is not significant.

The difference in time spent working for Hawaiian and Haole askers also was not significant.

Unfortunately there was insufficient overlap between the mother sample and the preschool sample, making impossible a test of the relationship between pressure for independence and dependency inhibition.

DISCUSSION

The results of these two studies lend a satisfactory degree of support for the hypotheses derived from the ethnographic study. Presuming dependency inhibition to be a high-probability response among Hawaiians accounts for a significant range of the behavior. Already noted is the generally inadequate academic performance of Hawaiian children, attributable, in our view, to their indifference to performance-reward contingencies. Hawaiian children are trained by their parents to avoid the vulnerability of evaluative dependence.

The general inhibition of dependency should, and apparently does, reduce the effectiveness of social reinforcers employed by adult agents assigned the task of controlling Hawaiian adolescents. Exceptions are distinguished by a high degree of reward for approach-dependency behavior.

NOTES

Despite the inhibition of dependency so clearly characteristic of children and adolescents, other ethnographic data strongly suggest that adults persist in the establishment of dependent relations among peers and less often with marital partners. Adults often describe dependent relations as painful and anxiety-producing, but inescapable.

Also characteristic of the adult population is a cultural distaste for

individual achievement, in terms of status, material wealth, and signification. More important is the pursuit of social approval, and it is this motive which appears to be central for an explanation of Hawaiian behavior. It is therefore hardly speculation to propose that dependency inhibition or its antecedent, dependency anxiety, may account for the importance of the approval motive and the relative unimportance of the achievement motive.

Hawaiians highly value amiable, noncompetitive peer relations. It is regarded as socially impolite to pursue acceptance and approval by a recounting of personal accomplishment, irrespective of subtlety. When confrontations do occur, they are likely to be highly destructive—it is not uncommon for example, for close friends to be offended by a wholly inconsequential act or word to the extent that a relationship is permanently severed. Hostile and direct confrontations are rare, however; avoidance is the much preferred solution to interpersonal conflict.

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