Adapting Culture in a Colonial and Capitalized World: Role Strain and Acculturation in Hawaiian and Samoan Families

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ABSTRACT. Despite being known for its culture of generosity, tropical beaches, and tourist-friendly atmosphere, Hawai'i's colonial history and present-day political economy have extended social stratification along ethnic lines, resulting in a number of unfortunate outcomes. In particular, Hawaiian and Samoan families residing in Hawai'i have been negatively influenced by social stratification, and have had to adapt their cultures to survive in a capitalist society. This paper explores how acculturation into an American capitalist culture contributes to role strain for Hawaiian and Samoan families by analyzing seven focus groups with Hawaiian and Samoan participants (N = 45). Although findings from

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prior acculturation studies with ethnic minorities provide mixed results, the data in this study demonstrate that forced acculturation into a competitive, individualistic, and capitalistic culture severely deepens role strain for Hawaiian and Samoan families. Policy recommendations are made, suggesting that Western institutions in the Pacific and continental United States acculturate to Pacific Island mores, reversing the colonial trajectory that has caused frustration among Hawaiian and Samoan families. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> © 2005 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

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INTRODUCTION

In the popular public discourse, Hawai'i is typically known for its culture of generosity, tropical beaches, and tourist-friendly atmosphere. However, Trask (1999) argues that Hawai'i's tourist industry has extended social stratification along ethnic lines, resulting in a number of unfortunate outcomes. Two marginalized ethnic populations in Hawai'i–Native Hawaiians and Samoans–have particularly been negatively influenced by social stratification, and have had to adapt their cultures to survive in a capitalist society. This essay will examine two interrelated phenomena impacting Samoan and Hawaiian families: (1) how role strain and acculturation impact these families' lives in Hawai'i, and (2) the influence of colonialism and capitalism on these families and how they have reshaped their cultures. Displaying historical and ongoing forms of colonialism, this essay illustrates how Hawaiian and Samoan families struggle to deal with Westernization in Hawaii.

Social Imbalances of Hawaiian and Samoan Families

Disproportionate Minority Arrest and Confinement. Prevalence studies have indicated that Native Hawaiians and Samoans are arrested at a disproportionately higher rate than other ethnic groups. Native Hawaiians represent about 22.1% of Hawai'i's total population, but make up 39% of the inmate population in Hawai'i correctional facilities (Office of Hawaiian Affairs, 2002). Samoans comprise about 1.3% of all Hawai'i residents (U.S. Census, 2000), while making up 5% of the incarcerated population (Office of Hawai-

ian Affairs, 2002). Furthermore, youth from these ethnic groups have recently been found to comprise a disproportionate number of yearly juvenile arrests (Mayeda & Okihara, 2003).

Economic, Health, and Education Issues. Approximately 16% and 28% of all Native Hawaiians and Samoans in Hawai'i, respectively, live below the poverty level, versus the national poverty rate of roughly 12% (U.S. Census, 2000). Residents from both ethnic groups are heavily underrepresented in the state university system (Trask, 1999; Franco, 1987), and tend to show a higher prevalence of health problems compared to East Asians and Caucasians (Kinkaid & Yum, 1987). Research has shown that exposure to modern life is directly related to elevated blood pressure in the Samoan population in Hawai'i (McGarvey & Schendel, 1986, p. 391), as are obesity, hypertension, and diabetes (Hanna, Pelletier, & Brown, 1986). Research has also shown that Samoans in Hawai'i have higher levels of acculturative stress, specifically with regard to occupational anxiety, being forced into multiple dependent social networks, and having increased access to alcohol (Hanna & Fitzgerald, 1993).

Likewise, in their own homeland, Hawaiians show the highest risk rates for diabetes (Johnson, 1989), and hypertension and heart disease (Wegner, 1989). With regard to Hawaiian youth, Stannard (2000) writes that "Hawaiians account for nearly 75 percent of the state's deaths for persons less than 18 years of age" (p. 16) and "Teenage motherhood among Hawaiians is almost double the state average, while the maternal substance abuse rate is much higher among Hawaiians than among non-Hawaiians" (p. 17).

Of course not all, or even most, aspects of Hawaiian and Samoan communities in Hawai'i are characterized by social disorganization and despair. Both ethnic communities have shown signs of resilience in Western and urban locales (Dudoit, 1999; Filoiali'i & Knowles, 1983). Still, it is clear that serious social problems trouble far too many Hawaiian and Samoan families residing in Hawai'i. This essay will draw from seven focus groups, delineating root causes of community and family strife, as focus group participants discuss aspects of ongoing colonialism as being fundamental to the challenges that influence their lives. In short, data from this study will illustrate how Hawaiian and Samoan families' cultural mores are transformed by an American and capitalistic culture, thereby creating and perpetuating the problems outlined above.

American Influence in Hawai'i and American Samoa

Though Hawai'i was designated the fiftieth American state in 1959, America has a long history of colonial rule in the Hawaiian Islands. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, American capitalists transformed Hawai'i's landscape. Cheap labor was recruited and exploited to manufacture and sell sugar. Additionally, capitalists redefined the process by which residents classified

land. The Great Mahele of 1848 revamped Hawai'i's traditional land system, originally based on communal tenure, to one based on private ownership that fulfilled capitalist objectives (Kame'eleihiwa, 1992). American missionaries also restructured Hawaiians' religious and education systems (Benham & Heck, 1998), and laws were established that criminalized traditional Hawaiian ways of life (Merry, 2000). In 1893, colonial efforts intensified as the Hawaiian monarchy was forcibly ousted by an association of white sugar planters, backed by American military troops.

In short, Hawai'i first came under heavy influence of the United States in the 1820s, as American missionaries and capitalists (plantation owners and whalers) began restructuring the major institutional foundations that characterized Hawaiians' way of life (religious, educational, legal, and economic). Of utmost importance, work was reconceptualized in ways that stressed strict time management, minimal wage earning, and high volume production–the general qualities that increase capitalist's authority and minimize worker empowerment (Merry, 2000). Over the years, sugar plantation owners transformed Hawai'i's geographic and social landscape by expanding agricultural estates, importing cheap labor, and uprooting the indigenous population (Takaki, 1983). In the meantime, Native Hawaiians' resistance to plantation expansion was mitigated by mass death due to disease introduced by Westerners (Stannard, 1989).

During the 20th century, the United States transformed Hawai'i into a strategic stronghold hoping to gain militaristic control of the Pacific. Presently, about 16% of Hawai'i's population is military personnel and much of Hawai'i's land is still utilized for weaponry testing (Ferguson & Turnbull, 1999). However, contemporary Hawai'i is dominated most heavily by tourism. While tourism is the primary source of revenue for the state, Trask (1999) describes how the pervasive nature of institutions catering to tourists has left insufficient employment opportunities for indigenous Hawaiians and the local population, while simultaneously making a mockery of Hawaiian culture.

The United States also transformed Pago Pago, American Samoa, into a major military base during World War II, employing large proportions of young Samoan men. In doing so, American Samoa's once agrarian economy was quickly changed to one deeply dependent on American commerce (Janes, 2002). However, as World War II came to an end and the American military abruptly left, Samoans lacked a major employment foundation that would replace the military in their new capitalized economy.

Consequently, young Samoan families began immigrating to Hawai'i and the American west coast in search of improved employment and education. The first tuna factories were established in American Samoa in 1954 (Hecht, Orans, & Janes, 1986), and today a limited canning industry shapes much of

American Samoa's economic infrastructure. Thus, much like Hawai'i, American Samoa's capitalized political economy fails to provide the indigenous population with adequate employment possibilities. Unfortunately, in migrating to Hawai'i, Samoan families find little opportunity to improve their financial prospects.

Theoretical Frameworks

Role Strain. Much of the literature on familial anxieties utilizes the theoretical construct of role strain. In her review of the literature, Voydanoff (2002) states that role strain occurs when individuals' multiple roles (e.g., work, family, individual) conflict with one another and that as varying roles become more conflicting and overdemanding, stress (or strain) increases. For instance, allowing a flexible work schedule, permitting family phone calls, and allowing days off without pay have been found to help reduce role strain for working parents (Warren & Johnson, 1995) and employed single mothers (Erdwins et al., 2001). Goldberg et al. (1992) found that role strain was reduced for single working mothers if neighbors helped to provide emotional and instrumental support. Conversely, research has found that contributors to role strain include having dependents at home under age six or over age nineteen, having a family member with a serious illness, having a longer job tenure (Kelly & Voydanoff, 1985), and working longer hours (Moen & Dempster-McClain, 1987).

Regarding ethnicity, research has shown a positive relationship between the number of children and role strain for employed black women (Katz & Piotrkowski, 1983). For African American parents in general, marital status, religiosity, family cohesion, and occupational prestige have all been shown as marginally significant buffering factors to role strain (Beale, 1997). No research on role strain, however, has provided a theoretical link between colonialism and familial stress; nor has any research on role strain integrated Pacific Islanders.

Acculturation. The acculturation literature is another body of literature concentrating heavily on family stress, particularly within ethnic communities. Definitions of acculturation differ in the literature and are becoming increasingly complex (see Flannery, Reise, & Yu, 2001). For the purposes of this paper, acculturation will refer to the relatively broad process by which Hawaiians and Samoans assimilate into American cultural/occupational norms (Uba, 1994).

Some research has suggested that higher levels of acculturation may serve as a risk factor, while other research indicates that it may serve as a form of protection. In terms of protection, Shen and Takeuchi (2001) found indirect relationships between increased acculturation and perceptions of better health

and social support, mediated by elevated socio-economic status. Mehta (1998) posits that acculturation and mainstream acceptance improved the mental health of Asian Indian immigrants. Regarding Iranian Americans, Ghaffarian (1998) states, "The more acculturated the respondent, the less anxious or depressed he or she tended to be" (p. 569).

On the other hand, Yu (1984) found that the most acculturated Chinese Americans showed relatively high stress levels, compared to less-acculturated Chinese Americans. Additionally, Oh, Koeske, and Sales (2002) found that acculturation increased depression by eroding a sense of Korean identity. While Lee, Sobal, and Frongillo (2000) had mixed results in their study of Korean Americans, they found that higher levels of acculturation were related to a higher prevalence of smoking for women. Finally, Williams et al.'s (2002) study suggests that less identification with Japanese culture may serve as a risk factor for anxiety symptoms for Japanese American adolescents.

Research has also examined the impact of acculturation on Samoans and Hawaiians. For Native Hawaiians, acculturation has been examined as a possible factor increasing stress and related health problems. While some research has not found significant correlations between acculturation and psychosocial adaptation for Hawaiians (e.g., Streltzer, Rezentes, and Arakaki, 1996), Yuen et al., (2000) found that adolescents who identified more with Hawaiian cultural values were at greater risk to attempt suicide. They state, "Perhaps it is those adolescents who strongly identify with Hawaiian culture, but cannot or choose not to integrate into Western culture, who are socially disadvantaged to a greater extent and at greater risk for attempted suicide" (p. 366).

Regarding Samoans, Hanna and Fitzgerald (1993) argue that as American Samoa has urbanized and as Samoans have migrated to Hawai'i, Samoans have been contained in a capitalist economy and its attendant occupational anxieties. In turn, occupational stress has increased problems, such as depression, nervousness, feelings of guilt, and anger. Kincaid and Yum (1987) similarly found that among Samoan, Filipino, and Korean immigrants to Hawai'i, Samoans reported the highest incidences of detrimental change in the health and behavior of a family member, in financial status, and in work relationships compared to the other groups.

Colonial Backdrop

While valid in some respects in and of themselves, the current theoretical constructs of role strain and acculturation are incomplete in the Pacific without taking into account the impact of colonialism. Blaisdell (1989) ultimately traces contemporary Native Hawaiian health problems to a loss of land base and suppression of Native culture. Blaisdell writes, "Displaced and dispos-

sessed, few Native Hawaiians now have the opportunity and accessibility to live off the land and sea as in earlier times. . . . Western self-destructive habits also include consumption of tobacco, alcohol and harmful illicit substances" (p. 12). The present study builds off of prior research on colonization in Hawai'i (Okihara & Mayeda, 2003). In this study, Hawaiian and Samoan focus group participants discuss aspects of role strain and acculturation in relation to an American, capitalist mainstream.

METHODOLOGY

During Summer and Fall 2002, seven focus groups (N = 45) were conducted on Oahu, Hawai'i. The focus groups lasted between 75 and 90 minutes and were separated by ethnicity, community status, and age. Focus group participants represented three different types of residents: community leaders, working-class parents, and adolescents (see Table 1, below).

Community leaders generally worked for nonprofit community-based organizations, the judiciary system, and schools. Parent focus group participants typically worked in the service industry, many of them working multiple jobs in hotels, as construction workers, doing clerical work, and/or as security guards. Youth participants were all public high school students. All 20 of the Samoan focus group participants were of Samoan ancestry, and all six of the Samoan youth participants were female. All parent and youth participants in the Hawaiian focus groups were of Hawaiian ancestry. Three of the participants in the Hawaiian community leaders focus group were of either Asian or Caucasian ancestry, though these three participants worked extensively with Hawaiian families.

Focus groups were held to validate a quantitative instrument that would be administered to Hawaiian and Samoan parents and teens. Additionally, focus

TABLE 1. List of Focus Group Participants

Focus Group	Participants	Number
1	Hawaiian Community Leaders	9
2	Samoan Community Leaders	4
3	Samoan Community Leaders	3
4	Hawaiian Parents	12
5	Samoan Parents	7
6	Hawaiian Youth	4
7	Samoan Youth	6
	Total	45

group discussions revolved around general issues that participants felt were important in their ethnic communities. The interview schedule included questions such as "What makes it difficult for people from your ethnic group to get by financially in Hawai'i?" and "What are some of the things that make it difficult for you to communicate with your children/parents?" Thus, semi-structured discussions emerged regarding lack of employment, crime, education, and culture. Permission to conduct and analyze the focus groups was granted by the University of Hawai'i Institutional Review Board.

Data Analysis

All seven focus group sessions were tape-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using a qualitative research software program (QSR NUD.IST, 2000). QSR NUD.IST is one of several code-based theory-building programs (Weitzman, 2000). It has the ability to index textual data as codes, and allows the researcher to build higher-order classifications and categories. Proposed relationships between codes and categories can be postulated, tested, and validated with this program.

RESULTS

Respondents described various ways in which socio-economic forces influenced Hawaiian and Samoan families. They described how these forces threatened the stability of Polynesian family systems. Their responses indicate two primary challenges for these families: (1) negotiating the conflict between work demands and family needs and (2) negotiating the conflict between the values of Westernized individual family members and culturally based communal values.

Work and Family Conflict

Respondents described how the limited availability of jobs in rural communities of Hawai'i forced them to work in multiple low-wage, blue-collar positions to make ends meet. They described how the physical demands and time commitments of these jobs had an impact on their familial relationships. One Hawaiian father stated:

> I have two jobs. My wife works at 7-11. For us, it has a big impact on communicating with my kids. She works at night from 10 to 6 in the morning, and I work in the day, and on the weekends. She's off Friday [and] Saturday, and I work [as a] security guard [on] Friday [and] Satur-

> day night. It's almost like a single parent thing throughout the whole week, and it's very hard for me to spend quality time with my children. I try to do as much as I can, but I need my sleep. She needs her sleep, and that's where for me, I gotta look what is more important . . . my kids [or] my job. And sometimes it's hard to choose. But I gotta do what I gotta do to make ends meet, and it's just hard for me but, you know, I just [keep] trying [to do] my best. But I know that [my schedule] has [had] a big part to do with [spending less] quality time with my children. [Spending time with my children] is very important. You know like [how the focus group facilitator] was saying about communication, you know talking with them, spending time with them and stuff like that. It's hard.

Another Hawaiian father described how the limited number of jobs in his community has forced him to travel to another part of the island to work. The commute in itself has adversely affected his familial relationships.

> . . . a lot of us have to go [into] town. [We have to] get up and drive over [the mountain]. Like for me, I gotta get up at four in the morning. By the time I get home, I'm tired.

One Samoan community leader described the impact of low-wage work on Polynesian families. His response suggests that the time demands of working low-wage jobs to make ends meet has had an adverse effect on parent-child relationships for Polynesian families in Hawai'i.

> Because of the way the economy [works in Hawai'i], both parents have to work, so the kid goes home and says "Ok, maybe I'll see my parents on the weekend." But, [the child has] a new attitude [that] is starting to build up, to the point when mom and dad say something, the [child] would start talking back. Mom and dad don't know how to deal with that issue, so what do you get? You get a spanking.

Individual, Familial, and Cultural Conflict

Respondents described various ways in which values and beliefs of different family members contradicted each other, resulting in conflict within the family. Their responses suggested that differing levels of acculturation of parents and their children to Western norms were the source of this conflict. For example, one Hawaiian mother, who was married to a Samoan man, stated:

> I think it's hard for [Polynesian youth]. I lived in Samoa for my first five children. . . . I have seven. First five are half Samoan. When you live in a village in Samoa, there's a caste system . . . there's a *matai* (village

> chief), and then there's a high talking chief. Well, if you're in a village or a section, in the old days, anyone that does something wrong, it affects the whole village. It doesn't just affect that family. It affects everyone in the village. So when the kids leave Samoa [and] come to Hawai'i or [go to] the mainland, some of them grow a little wild because they're used to having this discipline, this respect, and they come over here and go, "oh, I can do anything I want."

Similarly, a Samoan community leader with experience working with high-risk Polynesian youth suggested that many antisocial behaviors of these youth are related to their closer identification with Western culture and their abandonment of traditional cultural norms. He described this phenomenon with Samoan youth.

> Part of [the problem] is departure from the collective society [in Samoa]. No longer are you worried about a *matai* being responsible for your acts. In a village, you get in trouble. You answer to your chief, and if you embarrass the chief, you and your family [are] gonna have to pay pigs. You're gonna have to get chickens and all kinds of stuff. So you know, everybody says, "hey don't mess around, 'cause we don't want to get that *sala* (punishment) for breaking the rules of the village. When you come to America, it's an individualistic society, so if I'm going to be the one getting in trouble, I'll just get in trouble because I don't care.

Samoan youth respondents also indicated that there were different and conflicting values and beliefs between parents and children. Their responses suggested that different acculturation levels were the source of this conflict. Two female youth respondents (F4 and F3) describe this phenomenon.

> F4: The *matai* thing that runs all things in the family, it doesn't really happen down here. We don't really know what happened. For us, you know, we're in the new generation and our family is still back there.
>
> F3: In a way, our culture back in Samoa and our culture over here [are different]. A lot of people say that, the way back home is different from how they run [things] up here in Hawai'i. Like my cousin [in Samoa] would say, "this is supposed to be like this, there is a certain way." They have more strict things back [at] home, 'cause they got more responsibilities.
>
> F4: Here we have freedom. Not really freedom, but [our relatives in Samoa] think that we do.

Finally, one Hawaiian grandmother suggested that the conflict between traditional Polynesian and Western cultural values and beliefs has contributed to discord within Polynesian families. Her response is fraught with frustration, and suggests that the longer these families are Westernized, the more they are willing to accept disrespectful behaviors that are inconsistent with traditional values and beliefs.

> From our days, your parents were really strict. You have to have your respect to *any* elder you see. But nowadays, the kids, they don't give a rip, and that pisses me off. Because I came back after twenty-five years [and now] it's "F-this [and] F-that," and you know, all kinds of [profane] language [is] going on. And, I'm looking at these kids and saying, "where's the respect here? This is your *tutu* (grandmother). This is your *'ohana* (family). Why are you disrespecting [me]?" You could never do that before. And, that the *tutus* can do nothing anymore, because by law, you can go to jail. So there's nothing we can do. All we [can] do is step back and let 'em go. And so therefore, the kids just run off and do whatever they like. And that's hard on us, because from our days when I was raised here, it was totally different. And coming back now, it's a total different change. And it hurts. Because where's the *'ohana* in Hawaiian families now? Hardly any.

DISCUSSION/POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussions from these focus groups emerged out of a colonial context, and suggested that American capitalist culture has overridden Pacific Islanders in their homeland–the Pacific–leaving little opportunity to maintain traditional values that are incompatible with American capitalist norms. Certainly, participants in this study felt torn between their occupational and familial lives, a clear indicator of role strain. In this particular context, however, role strain is ultimately caused by a capitalist driven intrusion of low-wage jobs offering little room for upward mobility. Moreover, participants indicated that employment is often times geographically inaccessible, making communication with children an even more infrequent activity.

Furthermore, role strain appeared to be intensified by *forced* acculturation into an individualistic, capitalist, and Western culture. Hawaiian and Samoan peoples have historically relied upon extended family cohesion as a source of strength. However, in this study, it was clear that acculturation into the American mainstream added a great deal to familial stress. Polynesian youth felt torn between their parents' traditional, communal culture and the more individualistic, competitive ways of mainstream American life. Polynesian adults on the

other hand, indicated that maintaining social control was undermined by Western individualism, as youth were less inclined to feel their personal actions reflected upon their family and village. Consequently, participants attributed conflict between youth and parents to a lack of respect for elders and the wider extended family.

Participants also expressed that acculturation into a capitalist society complicated their lives by manipulating cultural mores that value sharing over the individual accumulation of wealth. For example, one Samoan community leader described how *fa'lavelave* (a contribution towards a major family event, such as a funeral or wedding) has shifted from modest gifts (e.g., a basket of taro or basket of breadfruit) to large monetary donations. Samoan parents expressed that because this particular cultural tradition has become capitalized, Samoan parents struggle even more to get by financially. Prior research has noted this same concern amongst Samoan college students in Hawai'i (Graham, 1983).

Implications for Practice and Policy

This study has implications for culturally specific policy reform in the Pacific and the continental United States. It suggests that economic and social institutions adjust their standard policies such that they are compatible with Hawaiian and Samoan cultural traditions. Most importantly, policies should be implemented that allow for family bonding (e.g., allowing parents time off from work and students time off from school without penalty for family events that would not normally be excusable in Western society). Economic and social institutions should also meet with Hawaiian and Samoan community leaders and parents to establish ways for family bonding to be incorporated into the institutional system that are beneficial for all parties. For instance, schools should hold informational presentations in the evenings or on weekends, given by students and faculty within ethnic communities (i.e., not on school grounds) as a way to engage parents. These presentations could be intermixed with food and social activities, in order to increase parent participation. Programs with a similar format have been found to be successful with Polynesian families in Hawai'i (Okamoto, 2000).

Finally, states are responsible for assuring that accessible and stable job opportunities are available for Hawaiian and Samoan families who may live in geographically isolated communities. They should also provide paid childcare for grandparents and other extended relatives in the case that parents are not allowed off work. In short, because Western institutions have forcibly altered Pacific Islanders' ways of life immensely in their own homeland, it is appropriate that these same institutions begin to move away from the rigid, individ-

ualistic, and capitalist processes by which they normally operate. In fact, this study suggests that Native Hawaiians' and Samoans' current health disparities and overrepresentation in the justice system may be linked to the occupational strains that were first implemented by American capitalists in the 19th century. Thus, at the very least, Western employers and educators should collaborate with Hawaiian and Samoan communities in order to establish standard rules of operation.

Unfortunately, most Western institutions blame the victim and identify Pacific Islanders as the problem (Merry, 2002). However, Boerhringer and Giles (1977) state,

> . . . the real crimes are those aspects of the dominant-subordinate relations which exist within the international capitalist system: exploitative employment patterns, rural depopulation, chaotic urbanization, poor health and housing conditions, a competitive and destructive educational system and other repressive ideological institutions. (p. 61)

Unless Western institutions in the Pacific begin acculturating to Pacific Island ways, the ramifications of colonialism will most likely continue to exist in the form of disproportionate minority confinement, poverty, and poor health. Further, forced acculturation into incompatible capitalist roles will continue to strain Hawaiian and Samoan families. In summary, the findings from this study recommend that Western institutions begin making significant systemic changes in accordance with Pacific Island norms, such that Pacific Islanders are not required to integrate into Western cultural mores that ultimately deny adequate health and maintenance of traditional culture.

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