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HOMOGAMY IN INTERETHNIC  
MATE SELECTION

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In America, marriage choice is for the most part restricted to a range of potential mates determined on the basis of shared social characteristics. Marriage partners tend to be similar in race, age, faith, social class, politics, and ethnic origin.<sup>1</sup> Thus, for example, a middle-class Irish Catholic will usually choose a mate from among middle-class Irish Catholics. Insofar as these social characteristics are concerned, therefore, mate selection generally reflects the principle of homogamy.

Most research on this problem has been designed to reveal the degree to which each of the social characteristics exhibits homogamy in mate selection. Typically, studies of this sort have employed broad statistical descriptions of the relative homogamy exhibited in each of the several variables.<sup>2</sup> The success of such a program is indicated by the growing list of factors found to be systematically related to this pattern of mate selection. These variables have been found to define and delimit the "field of eligible mates"<sup>3</sup> into which marriage is proscribed. Such findings indicate that nonhomogamous or heterogamous marriages are relatively uncommon.

The chief difficulty with such studies, however, is that they provide no means of understanding the heterogamous marriages which do occur. Some individuals violate the proscription and select a mate outside the

<sup>1</sup> See the summaries in such studies as A. B. Hollingshead, "Cultural Factors in the Selection of Marriage Mates," *American Sociological Review*, 15: 619-27, October 1950, and A. Strauss, "The Ideal and the Chosen Mate," *American Journal of Sociology*, 39: 204-208, November 1934.

<sup>2</sup> This approach is illustrated by such studies as R. J. R. Kennedy, "Single or Triple Melting Pot? Intermarriage Trends in New Haven, 1870-1940," *American Journal of Sociology* 39: 331-39, January 1944, and A. B. Hollingshead, *loc. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> See R. F. Winch and T. and V. Ktsanes, "The Theory of Complementary Needs in Mate Selection: An Analytic and Descriptive Study," *American Sociological Review*, 19: 244, June 1954.

field of eligibles. Barron has expressed regret over the lack of systematic information on such marriages.\* Although he has listed six factors which might be involved in some instances of heterogamous marriage, he has been unable to provide a systematic set of interrelated hypotheses aimed at understanding the problem.

It was with this situation in mind that the present research was undertaken. Intensive study was made of a small group of subjects living in Honolulu, Hawaii. This program of research had as its object the development of a set of interrelated hypotheses which would isolate some of the personal and situational factors leading to heterogamous marriage choice.

## II

The ethnic complexion of Hawaii is particularly suited to a study of heterogamy in mating. It is a polyethnic community composed primarily of people of Chinese, Filipino, *Haole*,<sup>8</sup> Hawaiian, Japanese, Portuguese, and Puerto Rican descent. Correlated with these ethnic differences are differences in race, religion, and social class, making interethnic marriage in Hawaii typical of heterogamous marriage in its broadest sense.

Although many members of the immigrant generation still cling to the attitudes and customs of their countries of origin, the community as a whole has shown a tendency to develop associations across ethnic lines. Unlike the rigid boundaries drawn between Negroes and whites in the continental United States, ethnic divisions in Hawaii tend to be flexible and unemotional. Lind has characterized the prevailing attitude as ". . . at least tolerant of interracial friendships and marriages."<sup>9</sup>

Accordingly, Hawaii offers many opportunities to observe interethnic dating and marriage in a situation in which much of the social stigma found in the continental United States is lacking. Although some ethnic restrictions do undoubtedly exist in the Islands, out-marriages have occurred for all groups over the years." Some members of the older generation still express anti-amalgamationist sentiments, but the general

\* M. L. Barron, "Research on Inter-marriage: A Survey of Accomplishments and Prospects," *American Journal of Sociology*, LVII: 249-55, November 1951.  
<sup>8</sup> *Haole* is a Hawaiian word for "stranger." It has come by extension to refer specifically to Anglo-Saxon Caucasians.

<sup>9</sup> A. W. Lind, "Backgrounds in Hawaii," *Monthly Summary of Race Relations*, p. 17, December 1947.

<sup>7</sup> See R. Adams, *Interracial Marriage in Hawaii*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937), pp. 334-47, and C. K. Cheng, "Assimilation in Hawaii and the Bid for Statehood," *Social Forces*, 30: 16-29, October 1951.

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atmosphere is relatively permissive in this respect. While intraethnic marriage is the most common form and receives the greatest social approval, interethnic marriage is not strongly disapproved.

The student body at the University of Hawaii provided an excellent opportunity to execute a study of this type, since the entire range of attitudes current in the community at large was reflected among the students. Voluntary associations, for example, ranged from ethnic fraternities and sororities which stressed endogamy to cosmopolitan clubs which actively promoted assimilation. While some individual students openly favored interethnic association, others refused even to talk with members of other ethnic groups.

The present analysis is based upon observations and interviews with twenty-two University of Hawaii students. Eight of the subjects were interethnically married and the remaining fourteen engaged exclusively in interethnic dating. Representatives of all the major ethnic groups of Hawaii were included in the group of respondents, which was composed of seventeen Hawaiian born, four mainland Americans, and one Japanese.

Each respondent was observed and subjected to a series of interviews and conversations over a period of about six months. In each case a personal history interview was obtained and several informal discussions of ethnic relations and intermarriage were conducted. The interviews were relatively unstructured, following only a general outline. It was believed that data gathered in this manner might be more instructive in revealing the motivations of the subjects than those provided by a more systematic but less flexible approach.

When interviews and observations were complete, the data were assembled for collation. They were carefully scrutinized and compared in an attempt to isolate those factors common to all cases. The present report represents an outline of the developmental and behavioral characteristics found to be present in all of the reports.

**III**

Individuals in the present sample all describe early feelings of rejection stemming from their social relationships within their own ethnic groups. Reportedly, such feelings frequently dated back to parent-child relationships and were, without exception, expressed in poor social adjustments in grade and high school. Since most social groups in school were built up around ethnic identity, these individuals tended to general-

ize their feelings of rejection to all members of their own ethnic groups. A young Caucasian man made the following typical observation about his adjustment in school:

I've never been close to *my* father, but my mother has always had a strong hold over me. I started public school but in first grade I had to stop—I got T.B. After that I read a lot and couldn't play sports. Then in fourth grade I was accused of being dishonest. After that I withdrew and played mostly with girls. In high school I was unpopular. I went out some but not much.

This background of felt rejection tended to generate a conflict in the persons experiencing it. Feelings of frustration were engendered, and these seemed to result in the development of hostility directed toward the agency of frustration. Thus, an individual's ethnic group became identified as an agent of frustration and was negatively evaluated on that basis. It became important to escape identity with the group. Often there was a conscious desire to get away from the group and from the things which symbolized it. Deviant behavior of some sort was the universal response. Delinquency was one avenue, as was active participation in marginal political or religious groups, but most often individuals simply withdrew and refused to participate in group pursuits or work toward group goals. Of course, such activities only tended to increase the rejection of the group and this in turn to reinforce the hostility of the deviants. Thus, a self-perpetuating cycle was built up in which deviation intensified rejection and rejection enhanced deviation. A modal response to this situation is described in the following excerpt from an interview with a Chinese-American girl:

*Pakes*<sup>8</sup> I have an ambiguous feeling for. Some I know well and I like, but I took a class in Mandarin once and I didn't like the kids there. I'm not acceptable to them so I don't accept them.

(INVESTIGATOR: What was the trouble in your class in Mandarin?)

Oh it stems from way back. I was forced to go to the Oriental school which I hated. I didn't like the teachers or the kids. They were all younger than me—just silly kids—infantile. I was isolated. I never played any games with them—just read mostly. I decided then that I was negative to Chinese. I learned very little of the language. I have no tolerance for Pake culture.

Following this background of felt rejection and the development of hostility directed toward their own groups, the persons studied were in each case exposed to another ethnic group. For natives of Hawaii this was a relatively simple matter, since the community always provided a

<sup>8</sup> The word *Pake* is Hawaiian slang for Chinese. It is mildly insulting, like *Dago* as used for Italians in continental United States.

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number of different groups with which personal contact could be made. In the case of mainland Caucasian veterans in the sample, this exposure took place in the service, usually during duty in Japan. In any case, exposure was accomplished and interest was developed in a different ethnic group. This new group was inevitably one which was rejected and negatively sanctioned by their own group. They were able therefore to equate their own self-conceptions with their conceptions of the new group. Since both were rejectees of their own ethnic group, a certain community was felt. This led to a form of identification which was manifest at first in an interest in the culture and the way of life of the new group. Growing knowledge of this group provided a set of values which rationalized their own superiority. Adopting these new Values as their own could provide a ready-made system for explaining their rejection as due to their superiority rather than their inadequacies. By this process these individuals were provided with an alternative way of life which rationalized their previous rejection and rewarded their deviation. Their interest therefore soon developed into a full-fledged internalization of the attitudes and values of the new group. One Caucasian informant described his growing interest in Oriental culture in the following manner:

I became interested in the Far East in about forty-five. I was in Trinidad in the Navy and had some Chinese and Indian friends. I was always fighting something . . . but when we began to discuss philosophy, Eastern philosophy appealed to me. I became interested in Buddhism and studied it. Then I decided to become a Buddhist monk. I learned to read and write Japanese and came to Hawaii on my way to Japan.

Such a statement typifies the pattern of growing identification with a new culture. This particular informant even went so far as to change his name to one with an Oriental sound. Others adopted the mannerisms and dress of the group with which they identified. It was not unusual to see individuals go to extremes to emulate the behavior of members of the new groups. Often their orientations were "more Japanese than the Japanese" or "more Caucasian than the Caucasians."

Internalization of the norms of the new group has been stressed as an important phase of the idealization of its culture. Members of the opposite sex particularly were idealized, and the desire to find a mate within the new group became important. Fantasies were constructed depicting the ideal mate as an archetype of the new culture. He or she was the possessor of all the positive features attributed to the culture itself and individual differences were ignored. Potential mates were classified categorically. They were positively stereotyped and seen initi-

ally at least as eminently desirable. On the other hand, potential mates from the individual's own people were categorically negatively stereo<sup>^</sup>typed. They were considered undesirable regardless of their actual characteristics. Thus, relationships with both groups tended to be categorical and differences among individuals were unimportant. This attitude was typified in a spontaneous remark by a girl of Portuguese-Filipino ancestry during an interview:

**I'll never marry anything but a Haole. Haole boys appeal to me. In high school the local boys I knew were all bums, but the Haoles were clean and ambitious. I wouldn't go out with a local boy if you paid me.**

**(INVESTIGATOR: Do you still believe that all local boys are bums?)**

**I formed the opinion in high school. Those were that type. I don't want anything to do with them. I prefer Haoles.**

**(INVESTIGATOR: How about some of the Japanese and Chinese boys around here? Aren't they known as clean cut and ambitious?)**

**I group Japanese and Chinese with local boys.**

The process of stereotyping, both negative and positive, is obvious in this statement. Such a person did not see those around her as individuals but only as stereotypes.®

After conscious acceptance of interethnic mate selection as an ideal, systematic rationalizations were elaborated. Outsiders, notably visitors to Hawaii, tended to visualize this process as an indication of Hawaii's "racial harmony." In some instances such ideas were important in the thoughts of the participants; they were contributing to the elimination of ethnic conflict. More often, however, the rationalizations merely represented extensions of the complex of identification with the new group. Hours were spent extolling its virtues as compared with the subject's own groups. The women (or men) were more attractive, more attentive, altogether more desirable. For the most part, awareness of the social disadvantages of exogamy was present, but the import of this too was minimized by the general feeling that the personal rewards outweighed the drawbacks.

When conditions permitted dating, available choices often bore little actual resemblance to the ideal. Pressures exerted by families and peers tended to inhibit interethnic dating for most individuals, so these rebels had no choice but to pair off. A Caucasian man looking for an Oriental wife would generally find an Oriental girl who was seeking a Caucasian

See W. E. Vinacke, "Stereotyping Among National-Racial Groups in Hawaii: A Study in Ethnocentrism," *Journal of Social Psychology*, 30: 265-91, who indicates that stereotyping is not unusual in Hawaii. Individuals in the present sample did not differ from Hawaiian? in general in amount of stereotyping, but rather in the content of the particular stereotypes to which they subscribed.

husband. While the Caucasian tried to appear to be Oriental, the Oriental was attempting to appear to be Caucasian. Very often each was more typical of the other group than were many of that group's members. This situation led a Japanese-American girl to make the following statement about her Caucasian fiance:

He really bates Haoles. He won't have anything to do with them. *So did the boy I went with before.* Yet I'm almost a Haole myself. I act **like** one. Why **does** he bother with me?

These deviant individuals were not acceptable to members of their own groups, but outside their groups their deviations were not noticed. Outsiders with whom they were able to establish contact tended to deal with them as stereotyped representatives of their own ethnic groups. Regardless of the extent of their deviations, these individuals were perceived by out-group members as typical Chinese or Japanese or Haoles. This usually resulted in the maintenance of appropriate social distance, but in the case of other rebels it led to their immediate and categorical acceptance.

Relationships between these rebels were often short and superficial. Built as they were upon the rather unreal conceptions each held of the other, they did not stand up under prolonged and intimate contact. Disillusionment was frequent, but it was with the individual in question, not with the new group. Consequently, partner after partner was sought, and each was initially categorized as a perfect stereotype of the new culture.

In cases in which disillusionment was delayed, marriage occurred. There followed a long and difficult process in which the participants gradually got to know each other as individuals rather than as stereotypes. Adjustment was sometimes difficult, but as time passed it tended to moderate the rebellion of both partners. A Caucasian man with a Japanese wife described their relationship in the following terms:

I had an antagonism toward my own culture and race. I was constantly fighting something. But with marriage I've lost a great deal of that. My wife is interested in Western culture and I'm interested in Eastern, and we sort of complement each other.

Each partner still tended to idealize the culture of the other, but the previously held extremes diminished and their two views were inclined to merge. Each retained enough of the attitudes and habits of the culture of the other to allow easy understanding. At the same time, each was allowed enough expression of his own culture to satisfy any rebellious desires which the other still held, in this way more stable permanent relationships were established.



## IV

This paper has examined twenty-two individuals involved in inter-ethnic dating and marriage in Hawaii. It has revealed a complex of circumstances characteristic in the development of these activities. A background of felt rejection within an individual's own ethnic group led to feelings of frustration. The individual became hostile toward the people and the ways of his own group and attempted to avoid participation in its activities. He was exposed to a new and rejected group with which he was able to identify. Interest was developed in the culture of the new group and soon it was internalized as an ideal. Selection of a mate within this new group was an important segment of the internalization and interethnic dating resulted. When mutual idealization could be maintained over a period of time, marriage was possible. Such marriages were difficult at first, but in time they tended to moderate the rebellion of both participants and permanent relationships ensued.

Analysis reveals a pattern of mate selection which systematically led to heterogamy. Ethnic exogamy was the aim. Partners were chosen on the basis of ethnic differences rather than similarities. As it worked out, however, the situation led to choices which were homogamous in other ways. While social heterogamy was sought, the resulting associations were homogamous in the sense that the pairs involved tended to share a common psychological make-up and social adjustment. In their attempts to escape from their groups, persons sought members of other groups as mates but succeeded in attracting only those who were rebels from those other groups. Both were rebels and both were rejectees. They had similar experiential backgrounds as rejectees, similar basic attitudes as rebels, and similar patterns of social adjustment through interethnic mate selection. As individuals they had much in common; and, since they were representatives of different ethnic groups, each was able to satisfy the rebellious needs of the other. Thus, these dating and marriage pairs exhibited a pattern of selection which was ethnically heterogamous but homogamous with reference to mode of social adjustment and psychological background.

## V

To summarize, the present analysis has derived a set of interrelated descriptive generalizations which apply to all cases studied. These following generalizations might serve as productive hypotheses for a more systematic study of heterogamous mate selection: (1) Individuals who

intermarry feel that they have been rejected by their own groups. (2) They become hostile or rebellious toward their own groups and their symbols. (3) They are exposed to a new and rejected group. (4) They identify with this new group, internalize its norms, and idealize its way of life. (5) Dating and mate selection follow identification with this new group. (6) Only rebels from the new group can be attracted, so that the pairs will possess similar psychological backgrounds and patterns of social adjustment.

One auxiliary hypothesis might also be drawn from the writer's general impressions concerning the data: (7) The social distance between the individual's own group and the group in which he selects a mate will be a positive function of the amount of his hostility toward his own group.