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Research Article

“You got to do so much to actually make it”:

Gender, Ethnicity, and Samoan Youth in Hawai‘i

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and Meda Chesney-Lind

Abstract

Although a burgeoning literature exists examining the intersections of gender and race in adolescent research, little attention has been paid to Asian American or Pacific Island youth, and this is especially true for girls from these groups. This study surveys the issues confronting Samoan adolescents, with a particular emphasis on the problems facing girls. Utilizing focus group and interview data with Samoan community leaders, other key informants, parents, and adolescent girls ($N = 42$), this study highlights some of the ways Samoan girls negotiate a social terrain characterized by both racism and sexism. Participants discuss unfavorable biases in schools, unequal domestic gender roles, western legal confines, and a lack of positive role models as critical issues for Samoan girls in contemporary society.

Introduction

In recent years, those interested in youth violence prevention have increasingly focused on research that explores the intersections of race and gender. Although a few qualitative studies have addressed gender-specific concerns among Asian American and/or Pacific Islander (AAPI) youth (Hunt and Joe-Laidler 2001; Hunt, Joe-Laidler et al. 2000; Joe-Laidler and Hunt 1997; Joe and Chesney-Lind 1995), most literature at the national level ignores AAPI youth altogether or groups them into one presumably homogenous category (Le 2001) and fails to capture the qualitative input of AAPI girls. The invisibility of Pacific Islander youth in most national research projects addressing adolescent issues is particu-

Table 1: % of Students in grades 9 through 12

	American Indian/ Alaska Native	Asian	Black/ African American	Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander	White	Multiple, non-Hispanic	Hispanic/ Latino
Reported being threatened or injured with a weapon on school property in the last 12 months.	13.2%	7.7%	7.6%	15.6%	6.6%	9.3%	9.8%
Reported having been in a physical fight in the last 12 months.	16.2%	10.4%	18.7%	25.3%	12.3%	16.9%	15.7%
Reported carrying a weapon anywhere at least 1 day in the past 30 days.	21.8%	13.0%	17.2%	25.3%	16.4%	22.2%	18.7%
Reported using alcohol anywhere in the last 30 days.	49.4%	25.7%	39.9%	60.8%	52.5%	51.1%	52.8%
Reported using marijuana on school property in the last 30 days.	8.9%	4.3%	7.2%	11.0%	6.5%	7.8%	10.7%
Reported that drugs were made available to them on school property during the last 12 months.	30.6%	25.7%	25.3%	46.9%	28.8%	36.0%	36.9%

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (1999).

larly disturbing. Although Pacific Islanders represent a relatively small proportion of the United States population, data show “Native Hawaiian and Pacific Island” youth to have higher prevalence rates on important delinquency measures compared to youth from any other umbrella ethnic category (see Table 1).

Additionally, recent research conducted by the Asian/Pacific Islander Youth Violence Prevention Center with youth in Hawai‘i, found that high percentages of Samoan and part-Samoan youth reported relatively higher rates of violence than other ethnic groups. Samoan youth surveyed admitted to “hitting a family member or boyfriend/girlfriend” (33.7%), “throwing objects such as rocks or bottles at people” (20.5%), and having “been involved in a gang fight” (19.3%) within the six months prior to survey administration (Mayeda et al., forthcoming). Such information warrants increased research and community mobilization efforts dedicated to Pacific Island youth. To this end, this article will detail some of the challenges that Samoan youth face growing up in urban Hawai‘i, with a particular emphasis on the gendered experiences of girls. First, we present literature and data from a variety of sources, in order to elucidate the social challenges pertinent to Samoan youth and families. Second, we describe some of the major challenges faced by Samoan youths, based on qualitative data gathered through interviews and focus groups with Samoan community leaders, outreach workers, teachers, other justice professionals, parents, and youth in Honolulu, Hawai‘i.

Migration Patterns and Demographics

Samoans began migrating to Hawai‘i in very small numbers during the 1920s (Hecht, Orans, et al. 1986). During World War II, the United States established a naval base on Pago Pago, American Samoa in an attempt to increase American influence in the Pacific region. It was during this period and the immediate postwar years that “the differing economic and political situations of American and Western Samoa led to very different population dynamics” (Harbison 1986: 75). As Janes (2002) argues, United States military presence in American Samoa completely transformed the country’s political economy and connection to the United States. A once predominantly agrarian economy was rapidly transformed into a locale dependent on American commerce.

Large proportions of Samoan men began working as ste-

vedores and construction workers on the naval base, and many eventually joined the United States military. Money and select industries were pouring into American Samoa like never before. But once World War II ended and the naval base closed, Samoans were left without a major industry to carry their newly capitalized economy. Tuna canneries were introduced to American Samoa in 1954 (Hecht, Orans et al. 1986) and became a prevalent industry in American Samoa. But American Samoa's push into a market economy also sparked emigration to Hawai'i and the continental United States (Janes 2002).

As of 1999, 16,166 Samoans resided in Hawai'i (1.33% of the State population), and 37,498 in California (0.1% of the State population) (U.S. Census Bureau 2000). And Samoans have established sizeable communities in other west coast cities, such as Seattle (Kotchek 1977). However, census data also show that roughly 38 percent of all Samoan households live below the poverty level and about one in four Samoan families is headed only by a single mother (U.S. Census Bureau 2000). Samoan families are about twice the size of the average family in the general population (about 5.0 persons, compared to 2.7 persons respectively), placing even greater economic pressure on families. With such high levels of poverty, elevated rates of juvenile delinquency are hardly surprising.

Juvenile Criminality among Samoan Youth in Hawai'i

Despite its perception as a tourist paradise free of the common social concerns associated with the continental U.S., Hawai'i's adolescent crime problems are similar to those in other parts of the U.S., including the occurrence of youth gang-related crime. Gang involvement is a particularly prevalent problem within the Samoan community. Chesney-Lind and associates (1994), found that 18 percent of Hawai'i's identified gang members were of Samoan ancestry, substantially higher than their proportion of the state population which had reached less than 3 percent in 2001 (State of Hawaii, Office of Youth Services 2001). Not all gangs, however, were involved in criminal activity, especially girl gangs. In interviews held with Filipina and Samoan girl gang members in Hawai'i, Joe and Chesney-Lind (1995) noted that girl gangs were more frequently sites of refuge and friendship than associations to engage in criminal acts.

Recent research has found Samoan youth to have higher per

capita arrest rates than youth from any other ethnic group in Hawai'i (Umemoto and Verwudh 2003). Samoan youth, while representing less than 1.6 percent of the juvenile population in Hawai'i, are arrested at unusually high rates for robbery (17.8% of all robbery arrests), aggravated assault (13.6%), burglary (5.1%), and larceny-theft (5.3%) (Department of the Attorney General 2004; Chesney-Lind et al. 2003). Samoan girls make up almost 3.9 percent of all Family Court referrals in Hawai'i, while Samoan boys comprise nearly 4.5 percent of those referred. In addition, Samoans comprise 5.4 percent of all Family Court adjudications and Samoan boys, in particular, represent 6.3 percent of youth referred for felony offenses (Department of the Attorney General 2001). With regard to incarceration, Samoan youth represented 2.62 percent of the general juvenile population in 2001, but represented 3.25 percent of all youth incarcerated during that same year (State of Hawai'i, Office of Youth Services 2001). MacDonald (2003) argues that Samoan youths' over-representation in correctional facilities is attributed to an overly punitive court system that discriminates against Samoan and Hawaiian youth.

It is also important to note the socioeconomic disparities among ethnic groups in Hawai'i. In 1999, Samoan families in Hawai'i reported a median income of only \$31,284, substantially lower for example, than the median income reported by Hawai'i's Japanese (\$71,061), Filipino (\$56,509), and Native Hawaiian (\$50,371) communities (Cheng and Ho 2003). Howard (1986) notes the relatively high percentage of unemployed Samoans in the civilian labor force and goes on to suggest that Samoans' cultural value of utilizing communal networks to secure employment, combined with language barriers and Hawai'i's prevalence of low-paying service jobs, all contribute to Samoans' higher levels of unemployment and poverty. Thus, while Samoans' reliance of familial networking and interdependency functioned effectively outside of a capitalistic milieu, *fa'a Samoa* (the Samoan way) struggles to operate successfully in Hawai'i, where a political economy rewards individualized human capital relative to social capital for occupational advancement.

In addition, Cote (1997) theorizes that as Samoan communities have been propelled into market economies and westernized culture, traditional Samoan values and rites of passage have been suppressed—traditional values and rituals which historically gave young men and women important status. For young women in

particular, Cote (1997: 230) states that the spread of conservative Christian religious values have confined young women to strict domestic roles that mitigate significant increases in status: Thus, we can identify a “crisis” in gender roles, whereby the gulf or disparity between the status of women and men in the Samoas has widened, with women experiencing a sharp decline in status. This crisis seems to be contributing to the growing social malaise there, particularly for young women.

Though Cote’s research pertains to American and independent Samoa, his hypothesis would presumably be applicable in a more western and urban Honolulu. Cote further contends that Christianity has disenfranchised the Samoan culture by making it more individualistic: “. . .included in the colonial missionary agenda was the goal of diminishing the Samoan concern for collective welfare, and replacing it with Western individualism” (1997: 223). As such, it is important to discern how contemporary Samoan communities are evolving in western contexts where capitalism and Christianity hold high influence, and furthermore, how Samoan girls are situated and are situating themselves in these locales.

Methodology

Merry (2000) suggests that spotlighting crime rates amongst ethnic groups crystalizes a criminogenic gaze already thrust upon stereotyped minorities. While this can be (and often is) true, reviewing crime and delinquency rates in a responsible way *with* members of ethnic communities, can assist them to identify areas of concern and mobilize resources to address those problems and combat oppressive systems.

In an attempt to tease out some of the gendered challenges relevant for Samoan youth and families in Hawai’i, four focus group (or small group) discussions were conducted—two with Samoan community leaders, one with Samoan parents, and one with Samoan youth (ages 15 to 17). Additionally, twenty-two interviews with probation officers, school counselors, teachers, school psychologists, and outreach workers were used to supplement the focus group findings (see Table 2, opposite page).

Focus group participants and interviewees came from a wide range of areas throughout O’ahu, Hawai’i. The sample of interviewees was drawn from a snowball sample of key informants from both urban and rural communities that regularly encounter Samoan

Table 2: List of Focus Group Participants and Interviewees by Gender

	Number Males	Number Females
Community Leaders #1	2	2
Community Leaders #2	3	0
Parents	3	4
Youth	0	6
Probation Officers	0	3
Teachers	0	4
Outreach Workers	5	7
School Psychologist	0	1
School Counselors	0	2
Total	13	29

youth. While community leaders in the focus groups came from various areas on the island, all but one of the parental focus group participants and all six youth participants lived in a low-income public housing development in Honolulu. As the youth focus group was comprised of all females, an opportunity arose to engage in discussions more focused on gender roles, perhaps reflective of some of the patterns noted earlier by Cote (1997). Every focus group participant was of Samoan ancestry. Three of the interviewees were Polynesian, and the remaining came from variety of mixed races and backgrounds.

Focus group discussions were free flowing and revolved around issues arising in the adolescent development literature and relevant to Samoan families. Though only necessary in the parental group, focus group facilitators who could speak Samoan were present in every focus group. A majority of the focus group exchange centered on discussions about role models, familial obligations, school life, and gendered and racialized experiences within each of these domains. Focusing more on gender issues, interviewees were asked semi-structured questions similar to those posed in the focus groups. Most of the conversation about Samoan youth in the interviews concerned the disadvantaged nature of the communities in which the Samoan youth often live and the impact of these conditions on their families. Poverty, limited social services, intergenerational patterns of criminal justice involvement, drugs,

gangs, and how boys and girls face and manage these risks differently were common themes that arose throughout each interview.

All four focus groups and twenty-two interviews were transcribed verbatim. Using grounded theory—process by which interviewers ask relatively broad open-ended questions that allow interviewees to establish topical themes which then emerge in the data (Strauss and Corbin 1990)—the authors read through the data and identified the most frequent themes independently. Subsequently, the authors categorized each quote into the identified themes collaboratively. This process of analysis allowed for discussion and debate with regard to the interpretation of the responses, while also providing for a process to identify data that best represented emergent themes. The following section summarizes these themes, featuring focus group participants' and interviewees' perspectives. It highlights the most critical factors in Samoan communities, with specific consideration of issues surrounding Samoan girls.

Results

Educational Neglect and Negative Stereotyping

Participants from all four focus groups and many of the interviewees felt that negative racial stereotyping, both in and out of school, plagues Samoan youth. In particular, Samoan youths were said to be labeled as uneducated, troublemakers, unable to communicate, and successful only in sports. One community leader felt that Samoan boys were classified in ways more harmful than their female counterparts:

I think the Samoan male has more of that stereotyping, perhaps, I don't know. That's my perception, that if you go to college it's probably because of a football scholarship or something. I know that's not the truth. . . I think that's the prevailing stereotype in the community, that Samoans can make it athletically, that's about it.

A Polynesian outreach worker in a housing project added to these sentiments by stating that Samoan boys may purposely downplay their talents, a cultural necessity in order to be "part of the pack":

The Samoan culture, I'm wondering to some degree whether it plays here, that you don't want to stick it out, no matter how talented you are, you still want to travel with the pack, you'll

accept recognition here and there and then you do something to make yourself less noticeable, make yourself more mediocre. So, if you're athletic you stand out and you get this MVP award, you do something stupid and people go, "yeah, I knew it" you know, it's just you're part of a crowd, and then you're not sticking out completely. We talked to some about going to Iolani and they shake it off, "No I want to go to Farrington." (authors' note: Iolani is a private school while Farrington is a public high school in a low-income neighborhood)

With Hawai'i having the highest proportion of students in the United States attending private secondary schools in the country (Steinberg 2001), another community leader added "Most of the time Samoan students are nurtured through private school only because they are athletes. . .when you're in a public school, the student is on his own."

One community leader discussed his own personal history of fulfilling the aggressive stereotype cast upon Samoans as youth: ". . .you have to battle that stereotype. And it doesn't help that we reinforce it ourselves. I mean, I'm basically guilty of it too cuz you kind of revel in it when you're younger." This same participant explained how a loss of cultural identity influences Samoan youth to seek identity formation in western media constructs that glorify aggressive behavior. In describing a cohort of at-risk adolescent Samoan males who he had worked with, this participant stated:

They were essentially the kids that dropped out of school. . .and nobody really wanted to work with these kids. Basically, those were the ones that were looking for some type of affiliation, and I think part of it was a loss [of] identity. . .You can always identify with your cultural background, that's something that's not as easily reinforced when you're not back home. So here, they're reinforcing what you see on TV. . .

These statements speak to some of the issues of identity crisis that Cote (1997) describes with respect to westernized youth from American and independent Samoa.

Samoan parents also felt their children were being neglected in schools. As an example, one mother discussed a time she visited her child's school. "I noticed that the Samoan children were left out of the discussion, and the teacher didn't make any effort to include them in the activities." However, the Samoan girls interviewed offered the most profound descriptions of how they were mistreated

in school. The girls discussed the perceived inverse relationship between athletics and academics, noting how people stereotype Samoans (both boys and girls) as athletically gifted, a quality that supposedly correlates with intellectual decline.

Youth 3: I guess a lot of people say that Samoans, like they have, athletic abilities, but then again. . .

Youth 1: Yeah, with the academic. . .

Youth 3: We got to work on that too. . .

Youth 1: I was finishing up. . .how so much people like stereotypes Samoans to be good in sports and yet when it comes to like academics and stuff, they think we're like dense.

One of these same girls added, “. . . plenty of people think that, because you're Samoan you're like rough and tough, like don't mess with us. . . Yeah, yeah they think that, like you lie, cheat, and steal stuff. Like if you're Samoan, like that should come natural to you.” Clearly, this youth has a strong grasp on the ways that Samoan youth, both boys and girls, are stereotyped, with very negative social characteristics connected to their supposed “innate” racial background.

Like Samoan parents, youth participants also indicated that teachers discriminate against Samoan students. One participant stated in regard to teachers, “Like they favor other people, because some of them (teachers) don't like Samoans,” with another girl following, “Yeah, a lot of the teachers.” In terms of how this affected Samoan students' feelings, a participant declared, “Yeah like, it's like we're inferior, like we're the leftovers and stuff.” These statements regarding teacher discrimination are similar to those expressed by Samoan youth in prior research (Mayeda, Chesney-Lind, and Koo, 2001).

A Polynesian social worker expressed how this racial stereotype can impact Samoan girls as they grow up in a western environment:

The girls are very open and bold. What I mean by bold is the way they dress, the way they look, how opinionated they have become in comparison to when I was growing up. They're very aggressive and assertive. We come from a culture where women are, they don't come up to the forefront. They don't assert themselves. They are more in the back. It all seems to be in a cultural sense.

Samoan girls are expected to negotiate their traditional culture in which girls are not expected to be as visibly assertive, with a western and youthful popular culture, where girls attain attention via conventional beauty standards. As Samoan girls are generally not granted access to these avenues of attention due to racist stereotypes, they are pushed to assert themselves in aggressive ways that tend to mirror boys' pathways of gaining respect. In addition, navigating traditional family expectations of girls' home duties with girls' personal desire for social freedom can also contribute to girls' aggression and delinquency, as will be illustrated in the following section.

Familial Duties and Gender-Biased Expectations

According to the youth focus group participants and interviewees, Samoan females are socialized into traditional gender roles, especially as homemakers and service sector workers—positions that do not require a college education. Samoan girl participants expressed that they have greater household responsibilities than their male counterparts. Youth participants claimed that they are expected to clean, cook, and do the laundry. They also have to miss school when there are *fa'a lavelave* (life-cycle events, such as weddings, funerals, and other major family ceremonies for which preparation includes sharing financial resources). Additionally, girls said they are expected to watch the family and care for the young ones while parents are at work. Conversely, as stated by one girl, "The boys, all they do are taking the trash out of the house and that's it." An outreach worker in a housing project also reiterated the expectations placed upon girls:

It's just dealing with their home, because a lot of girls have, they're, they're the ones who gotta take, especially older girls, yeah? They gotta take care of the house, they gotta take care of younger siblings, they gotta take care of everybody. It's their job. The girls have a lot of home responsibility, which a lot of times they get really resentful.

A social worker from a different housing project resonated the same theme:

It is just dealing with their home. Because a lot of the girls have, they are the ones, especially the older girls, they have got to take care of the house, they have got to take care of the

younger siblings, they have got to take care of everybody, it is their job. . . a lot of times there are conflicts between practices, "I cannot buy that because I have got to make sure my brother and sister eat and dadadadah" or "I cannot go today because my mom said that I have to do this."

Youth participants also stated that these assigned gender roles impact their ability to succeed in other areas of life, namely school. Mau (1990) argues that the socialization of "Asian Pacific American" females into traditional gender roles in the home and school is one barrier to higher education. A Samoan girl from the focus group stated, "Doing chores takes away from school work. Housework comes before school; it's family first, and other things come after." Also, the girls from the focus group explained how they are held back from participating in sports activities, while the boys are encouraged to practice for and play sports freely, especially football (notably one of the few conventional areas in which Samoans are consistently valued and rewarded). With regard to their male counterparts, one girl stated, "That's like their way out, like that's how they get out of our little communities, to get a scholarship is their way out. . ." Girls in the focus group did not feel they were offered the same amount of athletic opportunities as their Samoan male counterparts and went on to complain that counselors only made special efforts to help Samoan male football players attain college scholarships.

In terms of how these assigned gender roles influenced their identities, the girls in the focus group had a number of reactions. On the one hand, participants suggested the Samoan female is expected to respect all people, and respect is shown in the way that women and girls carry themselves, the way they speak, and the way they represent themselves. Not only do Samoan females and males tend to differ in the *feau* (chores) they perform, they are also frequently held to different expectations regarding social freedom. The Samoan family is generally much more protective over females than males. Girls in the youth focus group illustrated this portrayed reality in the following conversation:

Youth 3: Yeah we're mainly around the house people. They [boys] get to go *ka'a* (play). . . Like you feel like, isolated.

Youth 1: Yeah you're like locked down, for eighteen years you're like locked down.

Youth 3: You're only like mold[ed] to do and see this every day, yeah, you don't get to see life.

Youth 5: . . . We're mainly in the house. We hardly go outside. Ever since we were born is, that's your spot is in the house.

Youth 4: And if you go outside you got to stay in that same place.

Youth 5: In the boundary.

Youth 2: Like where they (parents) can see you.

As for the males, girls stated boys are allowed to go almost anywhere without being questioned.

On the other hand, even though the Samoan girls reported being faced with multiple family responsibilities, the Samoan girls showed agency and resistance. The girls understood their responsibility that family comes first, but it did not stop them from pursuing a higher education by trying hard in school. As one girl stated, "I know it's a priority, but it's just like an object in our way that you have to overcome, but I believe it's possible to go to college with like having choke (many) chores and stuff." Another girl followed with a comment indicating they need to work extra hard as a double minority: "Then again you have that thing holding you down. That's something that stops you from taking that extra step." Thus, in establishing their resiliency, these girls have developed a keen insight into the factors that influence their life chances.

Three interviewees linked this "over-burden" of familial responsibilities to girls' delinquency. A school counselor explained:

Another issue. . . kids outright rejecting their culture. Now there are several girls that I have worked with in school have talked very negatively about being Samoan, they do not want anything to do with being Samoan. . . I think it is traditional values (that they are resisting), being the mom and taking care of the family and that kind of stuff. Some of the Samoan girls are some of the ones who are getting more aggressive.

Another interviewee, a school psychologist, elaborated:

In some situations, the mother will be a single parent and have too high of expectations and will be too hard on the girl and will not give her freedom, will want her to be home all the time. . . not having boyfriends, and maybe see a suicide attempt there that will bring her into the system.

According to these interviewees, Samoan girls often times resist traditional gendered Samoan culture/values that may lead them to have less freedom than their brothers, to experience more supervision, and to complete more burdensome family care-taking responsibilities, sometimes called “parentalization” in immigrant communities. As girls want what their brothers have in terms of freedom, consequent status offenses (such as running away and curfew violations), self-injurious behaviors, more risk-taking activities (such as drug use), and simple assaults occur more frequently:

I know that girls are getting into fights not just in school, but in the community. They have [their] own gangs and mix *kava* (like boys).

—Polynesian outreach worker in a rural community

Again, in this instance, delinquent and gang behavior can be seen as a double edged sword for Samoan girls, both establishing a place for them to escape from family responsibilities that are incommensurate with those given to their brothers, while simultaneously creating gang and/or delinquency-related problems (Joe and Chesney-Lind 1995).

Weakening of Family Bonds

Parents and community leaders voiced their concerns about the changes they have seen within their urban communities and how urbanization and westernization affect their families’ development. Parents felt that when Samoan youth adopted rebellious behaviors it was due to corrosion in family bonding. This strain on family bonds has several sources, including poverty, changing cultural identity, and clashes between western law and practiced childrearing practices. Samoans fall low on socioeconomic indicators, with high rates of poverty which is a major source strain on families. Samoan communal culture and its general incompatibility with capitalistic values emphasizing individual reward is said to contribute to family strain. For instance, economic strain felt by families was said to be magnified by the fact that communal cultural values promoting sharing can be seen to create a financial burden from a western capitalist framework :

When [we] deal with economics it’s hard for a Samoan to be economically well and suitable, because everyone shares their

good, *fa'a lavelaves*. Regardless of what you have to share with everybody, you have to tip in, if something happens with your other relatives.

While this may prevent some families from sliding further into financial distress, it also places pressure on many others that are expected to contribute to the overall needs of the larger extended family.

Economic pressure that weakens bonds in Samoan parent-child relationships were also said to stem from both parents working at the same time, thereby lessening supervision at home. A teacher from an urban school on O'ahu, similarly expressed:

Because parents are unable to supervise they do not see half of what is going on and when they do hear something after the fact: one, there is not much they can do about it but two, they get overly angry and try to deal with the situation that way. Parents, are, I do not want to say naïve, but they think the kids are doing what they are telling them to do and that is really not the case.

Besides the socio-economic challenges listed above, family bonding was said to decline due to some parents' loss of cultural identity. In offering a possible solution one parent stated:

. . . identity, the loss of identity you know for most of the Samoan children who are growing up here, um even. . . parents have lost their own identity; how can we work with the kids when the parents themselves are lost? Um so I think it's, it should be a collaborative effort between the Samoan community, the education department and existing agencies in each community to sit down and come up with, uh, what there is to do. Maybe programs that will bring back pride to Samoan kids themselves, bring back their identity, um and. . . you know maybe talk stories sorts of thing.

Thus, it is not only Samoan youth who sometimes feel ambiguous about their cultural identity within this western context, but also parents.

Probation officers, parents and community leaders also cited the conflict between western law and customary childrearing practices that can separate parents and children. Historically in Samoan culture, corporal punishment is an acceptable form of parental discipline and can be a sign of love shown toward children. As

stated by one parent:

. . .the parents are confused because. . .all of a sudden it's blamed on the parents when the parents were trying to discipline, and they've been taken to courts. That. . .has been taken away from the Samoan parents, the way of disciplining the children you know by the law.

According to these participants, Samoan parents are losing a sense of authority over their children due to western legal codes.

Lack of Role Models

Research has shown that having role models is important in adolescent identity development, for girls in general (Nixon and Robinson 1999) and for adolescents of color from both sexes (Oberle et al. 1978). When asked about Samoan youths' role models, Samoan community leaders agreed that boys have male-oriented role models, which too often lead Samoan boys to form unrealistic aspirations. As one example, community leaders brought up professional wrestler and movie actor "The Rock" (real name Dwayne Johnson, a part-Samoan who attended high school in Honolulu) as one of the role models that Samoan youth (i.e., boys) admire. One community leader stated, "He's a successful person that's within the stereotype. He's strong physically, and he's shown that you can be successful. I think that it transferred from football players to someone more popular. . .He's a respected Samoan." Another community leader followed:

. . .athletes in general (of) Samoan ancestry tend to be more visible, so Samoan kids think that they can become a football player, but you know your chances of becoming a physician are actually a lot greater than becoming one of those athletes. . .and it sort of skews the thing. I guess only because of the visibility that some of these athletes have, like Junior Seau and several others that play [in the National Football League]. It's almost becoming a commonality to have a Samoan on a [professional] football team these days that kids think that, "oh, it's so easy to become a football athlete.

Note that the figures brought up by community leaders are very gendered role models—males who although intelligent, are known more for their physical prowess. Conversely, when asked who Samoan girls' role models were, community leaders were less

able to offer examples. Samoan parents were also unable to come up with examples of role models for their children.

The Samoan girls, however, provided a perspective that both conflicted with and reflected community leader perspectives. Samoan girls disagreed, replying that they do have role models, but in accordance with community leaders one girl said, "Yea, we're more realistic." For instance, one girl stated, "Mine's like my parents, like my mom and relatives. . .but say like my brothers, they'll be like a wrestling guy or somebody in the TV or magazines. . .somebody famous." In explaining why they chose family members (both parents and older sisters) over Samoan celebrities as role models, a girl said,

. . .like your parents, they'll always be there for you no matter what. When you're in trouble who is going to come and save you? (Sarcastically) One guy [who] is playing football? No matter what, [parents are] going to be there for you thick or thin.

Another girl then added, ". . .parents will always be there. Friends will go, but you have a family." And another youth participant stated of her sisters, "I look up to my sisters. . .my sisters, they know more about stuff that you're going through. . .because they been there. . ." More specifically, the participants stated that their sisters were appreciated since they could discuss issues "off limits" with parents (e.g., dating, sex, and school).

One interviewee, a social worker from a housing project, stated that it is always a challenge to keep youth from filling their "identity needs" through gangs or through violence or other forms of delinquency. For Samoan girls, and occasionally boys, one avenue for positive ethnic identity as well as role models was dance. Referring to negative stereotypes and role models, this interviewee stated:

We are constantly battling that. Our group [Dances of Paradise] is really good, they are not into making trouble like that but they too, are into the pride, yeah. They identify with that, they want an identity. That is one thing with this group; they wanted to keep their ownership with it. They did not want to be known as [housing project name]; they did not want anything to do with the association, so in the end they dropped [housing project name] and they took on Dances with Para-

dise. They want to represent their community but they know sometimes just having that name attached to it, yeah. So they are all about trying to turn it around. . .

In summary, Samoan youth have role models, but ones more typically associated with a physically violent masculinity. Moreover, the community leaders felt that although these role models were not entirely bad (for example, they stated there is nothing wrong with aspiring to play football), they felt that these role models influenced Samoan boys to have an over-emphasis in unlikely sporting careers that detracted from their academic development. Girls agreed that Samoan boys' role models were relatively unrealistic, but added that they do have Samoan female role models. Their role models were family members with whom they had developed consistent relationships, and who they could rely on in times of need. Additionally, girls and some boys have attempted to turn negative ethnic stereotypes around through positive cultural resources, such as dance. Such insights demonstrate a savvy and resilience in young Samoan girls from lower- and working-class communities.

Discussion/Conclusion

As the United States becomes more diverse as a nation, there is considerable need to explore the unique situations of all the ethnic groups that have arrived. Such a focus is particularly necessary when the group shows high rates of poverty and the attendant social problems (such as crime and/or delinquency) that tend to accompany economic marginalization, adjustments in immigration, and cultural disengagement. Hawai'i provides an excellent opportunity to explore critical factors in the lives of young people of Asian and Pacific Islander backgrounds, as one of the most diverse states in the nation with the highest proportion of Pacific Islanders and Asian Americans. In this study, an effort has been made to address a void in the available literature on the challenges facing young people of Samoan ancestry, with a focus on the problems of young girls. It is our hope that this study will pave the way for many in the future, given the serious social problems that afflict Samoan communities in Hawai'i, as well as the nation.

Samoan girls share with their male counterparts issues of educational neglect and discrimination. They also feel unhappy about

issues of physical discipline, and both elders and their children express concern about the Samoan tradition of *fa'a lavelave* (which reflects the expectation that Samoan families here in the states will contribute financially to family ceremonies locally and back in the home country), a tradition that does not coincide well with western capitalist values that do not emphasize communal welfare. In addition to these problems, Samoan girls report unhappiness with the heavy chores and responsibilities they have within the family, and the fact that their brothers seem to escape many of these familial obligations. It should be noted that given the heavy emphasis on cultural events in Samoan culture and the time involved in food preparation for these events, this is a considerable responsibility placed upon Samoan girls that frequently detracts from their educational progress and can even push them into delinquency, given the limited avenues that yield respect within western popular culture.

Moreover, Samoan girls also are not afforded the major "way out" of poverty that appears available to their male counterparts; they receive far less encouragement to engage in sports and other activities, often because of heavy family responsibilities and the sexist notion that sports are still an activity reserved predominantly for boys. As such, school personnel were said to be more active in helping Samoan male athletes to utilize sport as a form of upward social mobility than they were with Samoan female athletes (unfortunately, however, this over-emphasis in sports for boys often detracts from academic focus). Finally, Samoan girls look in vain for high profile female role models, even in a diverse state as Hawai'i, which just elected its first Samoan Mayor.

Despite this, Samoan girls still show considerable resistance and energy in the face of these daunting problems, expressing the spirit that they "will just have to overcome." Said one girl responding to teachers who discriminate against Samoan students:

. . .the world's not you know, they're not going to be easy on you. Cause the teachers we have. . .they're not going to just lay it down for you. You got to do so much to actually make it. Like, you can't just wait for something to just be given to you. You got to grab it and get it yourself. Not everything is going to be like easy to get. Like the teachers are not just going to help you. You have to act.

In working to prevent delinquency, it is imperative that youth programmers locate and tap into this insight and resiliency.

The findings in this study offer important insights into the realities of Samoan girls and suggest that establishing a proud ethnic and gender identity rooted in cultural engagement is key to fostering their resiliency. One mentioned avenue to achieve this was through dance. Polynesian dance not only promoted pride in the youth's communities, but also in their friendships and in their Samoan heritage. It also restructured the value the youth had in their bodies, by expanding a focus beyond sports and encouraging a healthy body image. Building a healthy body image may be of great importance to youth programmers, since recent studies have shown that girls of color are more at risk for body dissatisfaction, fear of negative evaluation by peers, and eating disorders (Vander-Wal and Thomas 2004).

This study also suggests that youth programmers working with Samoan girls should work to provide them with appropriate mentors and should try to strengthen positive relationships these girls have in their lives, most notably and when possible, with their sisters. Sisters can be critical role models and mentors who can help girls negotiate a social terrain muddled with multiple levels of oppression. Overall, however, it is crucial that Samoan girls be provided with adult role models, especially those who resemble their demographic backgrounds and who demonstrate vocational and academic possibilities that explode stereotypes and reach beyond the confines of the classroom experience. That being said, youth programmers and advocates can address the social challenges faced by Samoan youth by cultivating school attachment and a culturally sensitive classroom environment.

Moreover, as expressed by parents in this study, school administrators and faculty must begin collaborating with Samoan community leaders and parents to establish encouraging spaces for Samoan girls to excel in school, as scholars and in extra-curricular activities. Local colleges and universities must begin working with high school and middle school personnel to address the ongoing racial stereotyping and educational neglect of Samoan students, making sure instead that educators foster an ethnic identity rooted in educational success. Furthermore, for Samoan girls and boys, school personnel, local media outlets, and Samoan community members must be sure not to place an over-emphasis on athletics

that appears to detract from students' academic efforts.

In addition to professional-track higher education, Samoan adolescents would also benefit from increased vocational training that would enhance their ability to transition into adult-level occupations immediately after high school. Entwisle and colleagues (2005) found that youth in Baltimore living in high-poverty communities who began making orderly transitions into work after age sixteen were significantly less at-risk for school dropout. Thus for Samoan girls, common familial duties can be supplemented by vocational training that propels Samoan teenagers into careers that provide long-term occupational stability. Such training would also support Samoan boys so that they are not tracked into highly scarce (and often times unrealistic) athletic careers and erratic service occupations that rely on physical size, such as security.

And finally, educators and community advocates must begin providing engaging venues for Samoan parents to express their concerns as they adapt and acculturate into western norms, while also working to adjust mainstream institutional practices that are commensurate with Samoan cultural values (Mayeda, Okamoto et al. 2005). While Samoan parents may have to adjust the processes by which they discipline their children, western establishments must help familiarize Samoan families with western law and also adjust so that they do not criminalize Samoan cultural values. Also, as contended by Sua'ali'i-Sauni (2006), within the spirit of *fa'a Samoa* (the Samoan way), family problems and associated shame are inevitable parts of extended family life. However, family problems, including juvenile delinquency, can often be more effectively addressed by including extended family members in the healing processes. According to the present study, if schools and the juvenile justice system make efforts to do so in a culturally sensitive manner, this will help bolster delinquency prevention efforts for Samoan communities.

In short, key institutions in communities need to work together in sifting through the factors that impact Samoans' varying identities. It is essential that mainstream institutions that discriminate against youth by way of race and/or gender change these practices. Until the burden of change is placed on major discriminatory institutional forces, young people of color (especially girls) will continue to respond in ways that—although sometimes resilient and creative—are ensconced in systemic bias. Mainstream

institutions can begin not only by striking out the discrimination imposed upon Samoan youth, but also by restructuring the processes by which they reward young people of color. Traditional rites of passage once available for Samoan youth have been obscured by westernizing influences that lead to the devaluation of cultural diversity. Merging Samoan rites of passage or Samoan dance with mainstream educational programs, for example, would show Samoan youth that schools value their presence and cultural contributions as well as encourage intercultural understanding among students, faculty and staff.

Samoan girls face an array of daunting challenges and contend with teachers who too often stereotype them as “dense” and “aggressive,” while failing to teach them. They face familial obligations that frequently take time away from both their studies and their extracurricular work, as well as a mainstream culture that renders them invisible and without strong role models. That said, listening to their voices, these girls display an awareness of the challenges they face, an awareness of the importance of their friends and sisters, and a pride in their culture and gender as they “make it” despite the odds.

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