

CULTURAL COMMUNITY, COHESION AND CONSTRAINT:  
 DYNAMICS OF LIFE SATISFACTION AMONG  
 AGED FILIPINO MEN OF HAWAII

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In contrast to other elderly Asian-Americans (notably Japanese Americans and Chinese Americans), relatively little is known about aged Filipino Americans (Kalish & Yuen, 1971). This may be partly a function of their population size, as the Filipino aged in America are considerably less numerous than the elderly Japanese and Chinese Americans; the 1970 U.S. Census of the Population finds only 21,249 Filipinos aged 65 and over in the U.S., 82% of them men. In addition, low economic and political status, recency of arrival and relative lack of militancy may contribute to this inattention. Kalish and Moriwaki (1973), focusing on elderly Chinese and Japanese Americans, explained their emphasis on the former and apologized for ignoring the Filipino American aged, noting that they understood much less about them.

Most of what is known about the Filipino aged of America concerns those living on the U.S. mainland, particularly on the West coast. Kalish and Yuen (1971) have noted that language was a serious problem for these Filipino elderly, most of whom were born and raised in the Philippines and were fluent only in Ilocano, Tagalog or Spanish. Burma (1954) found that many of them sought American educations in their youth but that few succeeded as students; he described their educational level in consequence as generally low. Kalish and Yuen (1971) have noted also that the California Department of Mental Hygiene reported a disproportionately large number of Filipino men in state psychiatric hospitals. These authors suggested that this may be a reflection of the stress experienced (in California, at least) by this overwhelmingly male, unmarried ethnic group, whose social environment has been consistently non-supportive.

## FOCUS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The present study concerns elderly, unmarried Filipino men on the island of Hawaii. The 1970 U.S. Census of Population found that 11,882 Filipinos aged 60 and over lived in the Hawaiian Islands. The vast majority were male and unmarried, which stemmed from their recruitment as plantation laborers. The focus of the present study was on these Filipino elderly, particularly the elderly unmarried Filipino males living on the Big Island of Hawaii and residing in or near the city of Hilo. A basis for comparison with the conditions noted above for the Filipino aged on the U.S. mainland was thus provided.

Of interest, among other things, was whether the same degree of stress reported for elderly Filipino males on the U.S. mainland characterized them in Hawaii as well. If not, what factors might have mitigated this stress? What possible coping strategies might this particular ethnic group have developed within the Hawaii locale?

These questions are relevant because elderly Filipino males of Hawaii have experienced not only the kinds of stress putatively associated with being unmarried and aged. In Hawaii, as on the mainland U.S., they have encountered a shortage of Filipino women as potential mates, low economic and political status, meager education, handicaps in the use of spoken and written English, ignorance of the larger cultural milieu and a certain degree of racial/ethnic discrimination. This discrimination has been associated with their high social visibility, cultural distinctiveness, deviant values (for example, chicken-fighting and gambling) and a unique life-style that sets them apart from other ethnic groups of Hawaii.

### Background of Sample

The elderly Filipino men of the present study came to Hawaii during the main wave of Filipino migration to the U.S., 1907-1931. Largely in their twenties and unmarried (those few of the sample who had married in the Philippines had left their wives and families behind, and lived in Hawaii as unmarried men), they were recruited to work as cane-cutters and fieldhands on the sugar plantations of the Big Island.

Hard-working and tractable, they labored without complaint for long hours and little pay. As the last major wave of Asian plantation labor to Hawaii (earlier workers came largely from China and Japan), they rarely reached positions of management or of economic power and political clout.

However, the plantation camps they were assigned to live and work in were ethnically homogeneous. In Hawaii they maintained an almost intact ethnic culture of the Philippines, engaged in their favored pastimes of gardening and gambling and chicken-fighting, and served as *compadre* (godfather) to the children of families in Hawaii which they had come to know. All of these provided a closely supportive network of social relationships which gave them personal warmth, comfort and emotional security.

More so than for those Filipino men in Hawaii who married local women, these unmarried Filipino men were able to maintain the integrity of their ethnic culture. They were relatively free from the socialization impact of local wives and locally-born-and-reared children, and also from the forces of parental compromise and intergenerational conflict which could diffuse their Filipino identity and culture by exposure to the more dominant cultures of Hawaii. In this sense, these Filipino men represent a uniquely "pure" sample of an ethnic people growing old in a strange land--yet, as described in this paper, a land fundamentally functional for their ethnic continuity.

### Questions to be Raised

Importantly, the elderly Filipino men of the present study do not all share the same residential locale nor type of housing. Hence the basic question of the present research: What impact might the ecology of their varying residential settings--and the varying constraints upon life-style associated with each--have upon the extensiveness of (1) their activity and (2) social interaction, (3) their attachment to the Filipino ethnic community, (4) their degree of satisfaction with their living arrangements and (5) their general life satisfaction?

Lawton and Cohen (1974) have maintained that the environments of the aged, varying in the constraints which they impose, carry strong potential for influencing the life satisfaction of the elderly, who, more than the general population, are likely to be susceptible to environmental impact. The locales and living arrangements of the aged, major ecological features of their environments, have for some time been seen as meaningful for their life satisfaction. In this regard Bultena and Wood (1969) examined the relationship between life satisfaction and type of community, while Wolk and Telleen (1976) found the components of life satisfaction strongly affected by living arrangements; predictors of life satisfaction such as health, education and activity level, when taken in combination, varied in their importance in different residential settings.

Smith and Lipman (1972) found the unconstrained elderly of their study likely to be more satisfied than those constrained. Similarly, Wolk and Telleen (1976) found greatest life satisfaction among the elderly in a low-constraining environmental setting. Atchley (1972) indicated that older people's resistance to entering institutions for the aged was often due to their fear of a loss of independence.

Focusing on level of activity, Toseland and Sykes (1977) found it to be the single most important predictor of life satisfaction. This matched the conclusions of other studies (Adams, 1971; Graney, 1975; Bley, Goodman, Dye, and Hare, 1972; Lemon, Bengston and Peterson, 1972; and Tobin and Neugarten, 1961). The degree of social interaction experienced by the aged similarly, was found to affect their life satisfaction in a number of studies (Adams, 1971; Maddox, 1968; Palmore, 1967).

In accordance with the literature reviewed above, the following hypotheses were drawn:

Life satisfaction among the elderly Filipino men of the study would be highest for those living in ecological milieux which: (1) allowed them the greatest autonomy and freedom from constraint, (2) conduced toward the broadest range of activity, and (3) offered them the greatest opportunity for social interaction.

The present study added a fourth hypothesis, generally unexplored in the literature. In view of the continued vitality of the Filipino ethnic community on the Big Island of Hawaii (reinforced further by recent immigration from the Philippines), it was hypothesized that (4) those among the elderly Filipino men studied whose contacts with the Filipino ethnic community were strongest, providing them thereby with a closely supportive base of personal and emotional security, would show the highest level of life satisfaction.

### Characteristics of Sample

Certain unique characteristics of the sample have been noted. It has been mentioned that it is elderly, unmarried, Filipino and male (Specific data in Table 1). But in addition, the elderly Filipino men studied were (a) more or less comparable in economic level, (b) non-institutionalized, (c) in reasonably good health, (d) about the same age and (e) lived in a nonfamilial setting. Thus, there is a degree of standardization (inadvertent in most cases) for the factors of financial status, absence of institutionalization, health, age and residential separateness which the gerontological literature has found relevant for life satisfaction and other adjustments of the aged.

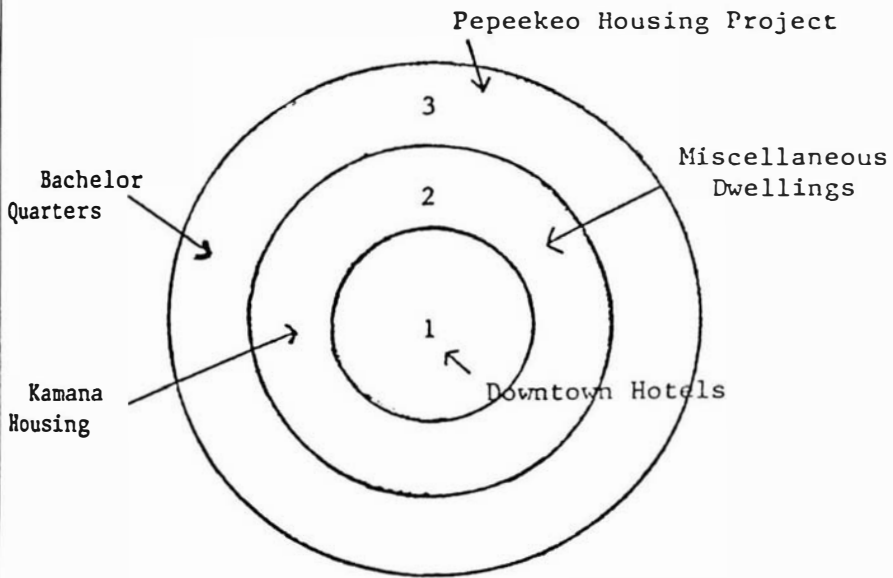
Most of these elderly Filipino men came from rural villages of the Philippines and are largely Illocano, with a few Visayan and Tagalog (Table 1); this distribution is generally representative for the Hawaiian Islands as a whole (Asunccion, 1977).

In the sampling, cases were selected by usual procedures of randomization; it should be emphasized, however, that the number of cases in each residential setting was small. The attempt was made to study the universe of known cases in all residential settings, except Downtown Hotels. In two residential settings (Table 1) the N's are in fact the total universe of known cases. Findings of this study, in any case, must necessarily be construed as tentative and suggestive.

### Characteristics of the Residential Locales

Five distinct ecological settings were utilized. Two of them (Pepeekeo Housing Project and Bachelor Quarters) are rural, two are urban-frings (Kamana Housing and Miscellaneous Dwellings), and one (Downtown Hotels) is centrally located within Hilo's Inner city. Figure 1 portrays their ecological distribution.

Figure 1



Zone 1 - Downtown, inner city

Zone 2 - Urban fringe

Zone 3 - Rural

Their relevant features may be summarized as follows:

(1) Pepeekeo Housing Project

This group of modern, medium-size, low-rise apartment buildings is located approximately nine miles from Hilo near the small community of Pepeekeo. A major sugar company of Hawaii built this project during 1975. It was designed to house the elderly and other residents of nearby plantation camps which are now being phased out as a result of economic/technological factors affecting the sugar industry. Many of these plantation residents were relocated at Pepeekeo Housing Project.

(2) Bachelor Quarters

These are old, frame buildings on the Papaikou sugar plantation, and were built by the sugar company during the large influx of Filipino plantation labor to house unmarried male Filipino migrants recruited to work on the plantation. They contain a large number of single rooms; most of these are now empty because the residents have died or moved away.

(3) Kamana Housing

These modern, well-equipped small buildings, located within the urban fringe of Hilo, contain two apartments each. They were built by the Hawaii Housing Authority during 1975-1976 to offer reasonably-priced housing for the aged of all ethnic groups. They are ethnically mixed, with a fair representation of Filipino men but a larger majority of widowed Japanese women.

(4) Miscellaneous Dwellings

A variety of housing (single dwellings and apartments) is represented here. Several of the aged studied here live in these dwellings, distributed widely through the urban fringes. Only these elderly male Filipino residents of these Miscellaneous Dwellings who were socially and physically active (to the extent that they regularly used the Nutrition Center within the inner city) were included in the present study.

(5) Downtown Hotels

These are old, often run-down, inner-city hotels. In addition to elderly Filipinos, they are occupied by a variety of other ethnic groups of adult to old age. Their residents are predominantly male. Despite the fact that many of these hotels are run-down and poorly appurtenanced, all of them provide porches and/or cooking areas which are centers of social activity and interaction.

Techniques of Investigation

The elderly Filipino men studied were interviewed individually by the same two male interviewers, one of Illocano and one of haole (Caucasian) background. Only those men 65 and over, born in the

Philippines and living all their lives in Hawaii as unmarried, were interviewed here. The interviews, structured but open-ended, were generally conducted in "Hawaiian pidgin English," but in a few cases the services of an interpreter were utilized. Each interview lasted approximately one-half hour and was tape-recorded with the consent of the respondent. All interviews occurred at the residence of the respondents with the exception of those elderly Filipinos living in Miscellaneous Dwellings within the urban fringe, who were interviewed at the Nutrition Center to which they regularly came for a meal and recreation in the form of card-playing and dancing.

## FINDINGS

Table 1 presents an overview of the relevant data; Table 2 provides an analysis of it, directed specifically to the variables (1) extensiveness of activity, (2) extensiveness of social interaction, (3) degree of satisfaction with residential setting and (5) degree of life satisfaction.

### Extensiveness of Activity

A distinct variation in extensiveness of activity appears in the elderly Filipino males who lived in the five ecological settings (Table 2). Specifically, residents of the three urban locales (Downtown Hotels, Miscellaneous Dwellings, and Kamana Housing) engaged in a range of activity far more extensive than those who lived in the two rural settings (Pepeekeo Housing Project and Bachelor Quarters).

### Extensiveness of Social Interaction

Although less pronounced than for extensiveness of activity, a definite variation in extensiveness of social interaction appeared for the elderly Filipino men who lived within the five ecological milieux (Table 2). Those whose residence was urban (Downtown Hotels, Miscellaneous Dwellings and Kamana Housing) engaged in a broader range of interaction than those whose residence was rural (Pepeekeo Housing Project and Bachelor Quarters). The restricted range of social interaction experienced by residents of Bachelor Quarters was particularly noticeable (Table 2).\*\*

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\*The index of breadth of activity which appears in Table 2 was achieved by dividing the range of activities (with the exception of daytime sleep) engaged in, as listed in Table 1) by the N of interviewed residents in each ecological milieu.

\*\*The index of breadth of social interaction which appears in Table 2 was achieved by dividing the range of specifically social activities engaged in -- job, walking (they walk essentially to visit), Senior Center, talk story, "holo holo" (going out and around for a pleasurable purpose such as visiting) and cards, as listed in Table 1 -- by the N of interviewed residents in each ecological setting.

TABLE I

## OVERVIEW OF THE RELEVANT DATA

	Residential Setting					Tot.
	Pepeekeo Housing	Bach. Qtr.	Kamana Hsng.	Misc. Dwel.	Dntn Htls.	
Universe N in Each Locale	5	5	6	7	25	48
N interviewed in Each Locale	3	4	6	7	8	28
Av. Age of Respondents	69.3	75.7	76.2	71.9	72.3	71.9
Native Language						
Ilocano	3	4	5	5	7	24
Visayan	0	0	1	1	1	2
Tagalog	0	0	0	1	0	1
Av. Length of Stay in Present Residential Setting (in years)	2	18	.85	12.6	7.6	8.3
Last Employment						
Plantation	3	4	4	4	2	17
Other	0	0	2	3	6	11
Daily Activities						
Job	0	0	1	1	2	4
Walk	2	0	0	2	5	9
Senior Center	0	0	3	5	1	9
Talk Story	1	0	5	1	4	11
Holo Holo (going out&around)	1	1	2	2	4	10
Cards	0	0	0	1	2	3
Gardening	0	2	5	4	0	11
Sleep (daytime)	1	4	5	6	3	19
Care of animals (chickens and pigs)	0	3	0	1	0	4
Other	0	0	0	4	7	11
Close to a Family	1	1	4	3	5	14
Liking Arrangements:						
Like to Stay	0	4	6	6	6	22
Like to Move	3	0	0	1	2	6
Reasons for Staying:						
Low rent	0	0	0	2	3	5
Established	0	4	0	0	0	4
Garden	0	0	1	1	0	2
Convenience	0	0	5	7	6	18
Friends	0	0	0	1	4	5
Reason Wish to Move:						
High Rent	3	0	0	1	0	4
No Friends	2	0	0	0	0	2
Life Satisfaction (Respondent Rating)						
Generally Happy	0	3	4	7	7	21
Sometimes Happy	3	1	1	0	1	6
Not Happy	0	0	1	0	0	1
Average Life Satisfaction (Interviewer rating; 5-point scale)	2.6	3.8	4	4.1	4.7	4.0



Degree of Satisfaction with Residential Setting

Table 2 shows a pattern of satisfaction with residential setting that related less meaningfully to urban/rural distinctions than was the case for extensiveness of activity and extensiveness of social interaction. With the exception of residents of the Pepeekeo Housing Project, the elderly Filipino men of each ecological milieu reported a fairly high degree of satisfaction with their living arrangements.\*

Degree of Life Satisfaction

As with degree of satisfaction with residential setting, Table 2 reflects a pattern of life satisfaction that related less meaningfully to urban/rural distinctions than was the case for extensiveness of activity and extensiveness of social interaction. With the exception of those residents within the Pepeekeo Housing Project, again, variations in life satisfaction among the elderly Filipino men of each locale appeared to be slight.\*\*

Table 2					
Analysis of Data					
	Residential Setting				
	Rural		Urban		
	Pepeekeo Housing Project	Bachelor Quarters	Kamana Housing	Misc. Dwel.	Downtown Hotels
Extensiveness of Activity (daytime sleeping omitted)	1.3	1.5	2.7	3.0	3.1
Extensiveness of Social Interaction	1.3	.25	1.8	1.7	2.3
Degree of Satisfaction w/Residential Setting	0	1.00	1.00	.87	.75
Degree of Life Satisfaction	0	.75	.66	1.00	.88

\*The index of satisfaction with residential setting which appears in Table 2 was achieved by dividing the total frequencies for the category "Living Arrangements: Like to Stay" in Table 1 by the N of interviewed residents in each ecological milieu.

\*\*The index of life satisfaction which appears in Table 2 was achieved by dividing the total frequencies for the category "Generally Happy" in Table 1 by the N of interviewed residents in each residential setting. Significantly, the perceptions of respondents' life satisfaction made by the interviewers (Table 1) followed closely the levels of life satisfaction reported by the respondents themselves.

## WHAT THE DATA MEAN

The findings above are highly meaningful both theoretically and in their implications for practical programs for the aged. Standing out strongly in the above data is the deeply ecological nature of life satisfaction: the close relationship that appears between satisfaction with residential setting and general life satisfaction. Contrary to the findings of studies reviewed above, neither extensiveness of activity nor extensiveness of social interaction, in themselves, relate this closely to general life satisfaction in an across-the-board way.

Most striking among the data, perhaps, is the extremely narrow range of social interaction displayed by the residents of Bachelor Quarters--yet at the same time, their relatively high degree of satisfaction with their residential setting and their relatively high degree of general life satisfaction, generally concurred with by the interviewers' perceptions as well (Table 1).

Deeply significant, then, for the general life satisfaction of the elderly Filipino male appears to be his personal satisfaction with his living arrangements as such. It might be well for planners and program builders to keep this in mind in respect to the aged in general, as well as for this group of elderly Filipino males. It is possible that residential satisfaction, relating closely to general life satisfaction in the present study, may sometimes find itself relatively ignored as a result of the attention given to the primacy of activity and social interaction in an American culture which emphasizes keeping busy and socially interactive.

At the same time, importantly, Table 2 indicates that for one ecological setting (the Pepeekeo Housing Project) not only was there a close association of low residential satisfaction with low life satisfaction, but there also existed an equally close association of low life satisfaction, narrow range of activity and narrow range of social interaction. Similarly, there existed for two urban ecological settings (Downtown Hotels and Miscellaneous Dwellings) a comparably close association of high life satisfaction, extensive social activity and extensive social interaction.

Ecological and Social Factors

What ecological and social factors might help to explain these relationships? Looking first at the Pepeekeo Housing Project (Table 1), one notes that the interviewed residents were there a relatively short time, so that few deep bonds of association and interaction may have developed. Its residents, few of whom are Filipino, were relocated there from phased-out plantation camps and are of greatly varying age, ethnicity and previous plantation settlement. No continuity of Filipino ethnic culture has been maintained. Noisy with the sounds of children playing, its buildings (as a result of their design) offer few structural opportunities to its elderly Filipino residents for easy social interaction and common activity. Structurally, too, they make difficult such things as gardening and the keeping of fighting chickens.

Most of all, its distance from the city of Hilo (which houses within its inner city today the core of the older Filipino ethnic culture) and the absence of ready transportation to it (making this distance ecologically significant) means that its elderly Filipino residents are limited still further in their activity and social interaction. They are deprived thereby of direct, frequent association with the Filipino ethnic community of Hilo. They cannot easily utilize the inner city's Nutrition Center with its food and recreational opportunities, its pool halls and saloons, its "action." Residents of the Pepeekeo Housing Project reflect this deprivation, citing "no friends" and "loneliness" as basic complaints symptomatic of their isolation, estrangement and alienation. They find themselves deeply constrained through this combination of ecological and social barriers. And as Smith and Lipman (1972) and Wolk and Telleen (1976) have found, such constraints bode ill for life satisfaction among the elderly.

Data from the Downtown Hotels and Miscellaneous Dwellings indicate a thoroughly more sanguine picture. Ecologically and socially, these residential settings appear conducive to a breadth of activity and social interaction (Table 2), and thus to the high levels of life satisfaction which the residents of these settings display. Several of the studies previously cited concur directly with this finding.

How, then, do these urban ecological settings conceivable achieve this for the elderly Filipino? First, quite distinct from the situation in the Pepeekeo Housing Project, the old Filipino men in urban locales are generally unconstrained ecologically and socially. Their specific ecological niche allows them to come and go rather easily, gives them fairly ready access to the outside things they like to do--the pool halls and saloons, the Nutrition Center with its opportunities for food, cards, and dancing, the bandstand park with its chance to "talk story." (Reminiscence is a major part of "talking story." McMahon and Rhudick (1964) have found the opportunity to reminisce to be an important component of life satisfaction.)

The Downtown Hotels, most of all, provided structural opportunity through porches and common cooking rooms to gather regularly with their elderly friends who lived there. ("Friends" as well as "Convenience" was cited often by them as a reason for staying there.) The elderly Filipino residents of such hotels partook in a particularly comprehensive way in the action of the Filipino ethnic culture, and found comfort in its activities, values and norms which they were able to share directly with others. The general respect and affection for the aged in Filipino culture helped to bolster their morale; their identity as old Filipino men (*manong*) was a comfortable one there. Their close association with the Filipino ethnic community, moreover, heightened their chances to be close to a family (table 1) and to serve as *compadre* to its children. Rosow (1967) has found family ties to be a major source of life satisfaction among the aged.

Importantly, too, their inner-city milieu served to augment their job opportunities and activity both before and after retirement (Table 1, "Last Employment" and "Daily Activities"); for example, several of them are still gainfully employed. As Rosow (1967) found, work figures strongly as a source of life satisfaction for the elderly.

### Absence of Urban Renewal

Significant in this continued vitality of the Filipino ethnic culture within Hilo's inner city has been (a) the absence of urban "renewal" (the fear of possible tidal waves has been a factor impeding it) with its frequent destruction of inner-city culture and (b) the absence of ecological invasion by a new ethnic group. The ecological dynamics of the inner city of Hilo, conceivably in part related to Hilo's being a middle-sized city (with a population of approximately 37,000 at the present writing) rather than a metropolis, have been benign ones for elderly Filipino men of urban locale; it has functioned as a "good" ghetto, in this sense. This contrasts favorably with the situation reported for Los Angeles by Morales (1974), where an urban renewal project (Bunker Hill) destroyed the central community and meeting place of the Filipino elderly. In addition, quite distinct from the situation in Hilo, Los Angeles has experienced a disruption of its Filipino ethnic community through subcultural infighting and disunity (Cordova, 1973).

### The Phenomenon of Aging Itself

But, not least of all, is the possibility that the broadened range of activity and social interaction, which ecological placement in Downtown Hotels of the inner city makes particularly possible, is enhanced in its positive impact upon life satisfaction by the phenomenon of aging itself. With the "coming of age," certain socially divisive features of *machismo* (for example, *amor propio* with its sensitivity to insult and affront), a personality legacy from Spain, may begin to drop out of Filipino male consciousness and the genuinely smooth interpersonal relationships strongly valued in Filipino culture (Lynch, 1964) may reach their ultimate fruition--so that these *hinggud* ("ripe") years of old age become particularly enjoyable in an interpersonal male-bonding sense.

What is suggested here is that these Filipino elderly are to a great extent freed by old age from the interpersonally disruptive consequences of a sex drive not easily accommodated by the male/female numerical disproportion which has been their lot. Prostitution, family quarrels and rape in Filipino plantation camps have been attributed to this imbalance in sex ratio (Benjamin Manor in Asuncion, 1977). One may speculate that the oft-cited attachment to chicken fighting and the fighting cocks themselves may function for these old Filipino men as surrogates of their former sexual competitiveness, now safely displaced through the mechanism of what might be called (with a nod to Max Weber) the *routinization of machismo*. In this regard, "no more trouble" was often reported by these elderly Filipino men as a fundamental base of their positive life satisfaction.

## SUMMARY

The present study investigated the impact of ecological factors associated with residential setting upon: (1) extensiveness of activity and (2) social interaction, (3) freedom from constraint, (4) attachment to ethnic community and (5) life satisfaction among elderly, unmarried Filipino men on the island of Hawaii.

The hypotheses of close association of life satisfaction with activity and with social interaction were found to be partly substantiated and partly unsubstantiated; contrary to expectation engendered by certain studies in the gerontological literature, neither extensiveness of activity nor extensiveness of social interaction in themselves related closely to life satisfaction in an across-the-board way.

The hypotheses of close association of life satisfaction with freedom from environmental constraint and with strength of attachment to ethnic community, on the other hand, were found to be strongly substantiated. Standing out clearly in the data is the deeply ecological nature of life satisfaction, and its clear-cut relation to personal satisfaction with the elderly's living arrangements as such.

The reader is reminded that the number of cases in each residential setting was small. Findings of the study must be regarded, accordingly, as tentative and suggestive. To the question raised early in the paper as to whether the stress putatively experienced by elderly Filipino men on the U.S. mainland is duplicated in Hawaii, the answer must be a qualified no. The ecological and social conditions noted for them on the island of Hawaii, particularly in their urban milieux, have made their adjustment a generally positive one.

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