THE AFRICAN CHILD AND THE DILEMMA OF
CHANGING FAMILY FUNCTIONS:
A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

by
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Introduction

The year of the child must, inevitably, draw attention to the major source of influence on the child — the family. There is consensus among social scientists that the family is the starting point of all discourse about the child since it represents the primary socialising which impinges on the child, even prenatally. It is primarily the family which transforms that mass of neurons, muscles and bones called the neonate into a person who is sufficiently human to meet the expectations and demands of the society in which he or she is expected to function (Young, 1944). Among psychologists, both dynamic and behavioural schools of thought are agreed that the socialising influence of the family is immensely significant. In this connection, the psychoanalytic perspective stresses that ‘the major directions of personality are set in early childhood’, and that adult personality ‘can best be understood in terms of its developmental rather than its contemporaneous existence’ (Kenkel, 1966, 348). On the other hand, behavioural theorists (e.g., Rheingold, 1960; 1961), while noting contemporaneous factors in personality functioning, contend that the individual’s personality development can best be understood through an appraisal of the person’s ‘reinforcement history’, and that the family represents a major reinforcing agency, particularly in childhood.

Currently, African societies are showing increasing concern over children and young adolescents, especially in the area of discipline and the increasing incidence of problem children. In the attempt to determine the source of these problems, fingers have been pointed variously at the schools, the churches, the family, and the society as a whole, and to the supposed bankruptcy of these socialising agencies. There is no question but that all elements may be involved to some extent. Furthermore, these problems may, in fact, represent the early visible signs of the general social upheaval which emerging African societies are experiencing. In this paper, I will concern myself with the predicaments of parents and children in African societies, in which families are undergoing structural and functional changes as the continent embraces technological progress.
The Role of the Psychologist in the Study of Family Functioning

Before undertaking a discussion of our primary subject, I will examine the nature of the influence which psychologists have had and should have on matters affecting the family. Although psychologists have, traditionally, presented the posture of being the leading social scientists concerned with the individual's developmental genesis and processes, psychology as a discipline has, until recently, paid very little attention to the study of the family. It is true that Freud assigned considerable prominence to the child's relationship with each parent, while behaviour theorists argue that the early conditioning processes are, in fact, largely responsible for future adaptation or maladaptation.

In spite of these beliefs, psychologists systematically ignored the study of the family. One of the few notable exceptions was Erikson's developmental model which was derived from a combination of psychoanalytic concepts of personal growth and pathology, and anthropological notions of personality and culture (Erikson, 1959; 1965). However, Erikson's model has not been developed into a comprehensive psychological basis for understanding family functioning and dynamics. In this connection, Hareven (1971) observed that although psychology is contributing to the recent renewal of the study of the family, the whole subject area has remained, essentially, an exclusive preserve of sociology. Understandably, however, sociological studies have generally not been geared to assessing those variables which permit the evaluation of the individual's unique and ontological developmental processes or the assessment of objective interpersonal variables inherent in the dynamics of family life.

The reason for the neglect of family studies was that, for a long time, psychologists did not recognise the special attributes which the study of the family could contribute to the study and understanding of the child. Thus, having accepted the dictum that the family matrix is significant in a child's development, psychologists ignored the area without realising that, in so doing, a major aspect of child development study was, in fact, prematurely abandoned.

In recent years, however, there has been a clear shift in the attitudes of psychologists to this all important issue. In fact, there has occurred a welcome burgeoning of literature on family functioning. It has become clear that it is meaningless to try to understand the individual, especially the child, without an adequate appreciation of the type of family matrix within which the child functions. As a result, the study of the family has become a specialised area, drawing in such varied specialists as psychiatrists, psychologists, educationalists, social workers, the clergy, pediatricians and sociologists. These specialists have found that intervention procedures (in situations of psychopathology, or in the planning of social and educational pro-
grammes) often miss the mark because of the neglect of the family as a functional system (Speck and Attneave, 1973; Spiegel, 1971; Howell, 1975; Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark, 1973).

The appraisal of the family has blossomed in two distinct directions. In the first place, the family has been examined as a socialising agency which has a significant input in the psycho-social development of the individual. A second development has been the study of family dynamics (i.e., the study of the structure and functioning of the family as a unit with distinct characteristics) and how these factors affect family members. One must note, however, that these studies have, unfortunately, been largely concerned with Western family life, and the literature is particularly deficient in regard to the African family and the African child.

Much of the evaluation of the family as a socialising agency evolved from Freud’s insights (1938) and anthropological/sociological studies (e.g., Mead, 1962). Useful though these observations have been, they have not generated the objective assessment of quantifiable independent variables which underlie various parenting strategies. Fortunately, some pioneering psychological appraisal is now emerging. For example, Baumrind (1971a; 1971b) identified some family dispositions and how these factors affect the socialisation of the child. Baumrind noted several parental types (e.g., the authoritative parent, the permissive parent, the rejecting parent and several other parental types), and provided some exploratory insights regarding the role of these parenting strategies (or parental dispositions) on the personality development of the child. In a finding regarding parental authority, Baumrind (1971a) reported that authoritative parents tended to produce children who were relatively more responsible, competent and independent. However, an intriguing pointer to the complexity of the problem was that the results varied depending on another variable in the parents' own behaviour — their conformity or non-conformity to societal norms. For instance, authoritative parents tended to produce relatively more independent, responsible and competent girls only if the parents themselves were of the conforming type, while, among boys, the same authoritative parenting style produced independent, competent and responsible boys only if the parents were not particularly conforming in their own behaviours! The few exploratory studies of parental behaviours in Africa have produced tentative and inconclusive results (Durojaiye, 1973; Okonji, 1971). Thus, Woebner (1975) was obliged to conclude that ‘there are more variables which may have to be tied in before we can adequately understand how the actions of parents affect their children’s performance in Africa’ (p. 30).

The evaluation of the family as a dynamic system emerged, largely, from clinical work, particularly in psychiatry. In studies of emotional illness, several investigators (e.g., Bell, 1962; Lidz et al., 1957; Franklin, 1969) found clear-cut parallels between the emotional problems of patients
and the emotional life of their entire family. As a result of this, many clinical practitioners began to recognise the family as the site of pathology and observed that frequently families would select one of their members as the ‘identified’ carrier of family pathology. These findings prompted Laing (1969) to conclude that ‘every one who has made a close study of the families of schizophrenics appears to agree that much, or even all, of the apparent irrationality of the individual finds its rationality in its original family context’ (p. 48). Consequently, a major approach in family therapy is to isolate for change, family behaviours which, in view of their pathogenic features, contribute to the appearance or maintenance of symptoms in one or more family members.

These two dimensions of family study clearly indicate that not only does the family determine personality development, but that the family also determines, in large measure, the well-being of its individual members through parenting styles and the dynamic interpersonal ties between family members. Recent investigations have also indicated that these ties cannot be conceptualised in ‘nuclear family’ terms, but must include the extended family — the dead as well as the future generations (Hade, 1965; Koller, 1974; Sussman, 1959; Sussman and Burchinal, 1962; Lewis et al., 1976).

In recognition of the centrality of the family in child development, the well-known child psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner has observed that:

The relationships in families are the juice of life, the longings and frustrations and intense loyalties. We get our strengths from those relationships, we enjoy them, even the painful ones. Of course, we also get some of our problems from them, but the power to survive those problems comes from the family, too (1977, 47).

Bronfenbrenner noted, however, that in industrialised or industrialising societies people often move away from meaningful traditional ways of raising children ‘without instituting new ways of doing all the things families used to do’ (p. 45). This is the crux of the dilemma which children and their parents face in the emerging nations of Africa where the goal of technological growth is an all-consuming pursuit.

The Family Matrix — African and Western Notions

In order to understand the present predicament it is necessary to examine, briefly, the nature of the structure and function of families in both Western and traditional African societies. Writing about the African family system, Mbiti (1969) observed that the family in Africa is broad based and includes uncles, aunts and distant cousins, and even the departed relatives whom he designated as the ‘living dead’. The ‘living dead’ are alive in the memories of the living and, though dead, are believed to be still interested in the affairs of the family to which they had belonged in their physical life.
Functionally, the extended family is often claimed by its adherents as a ‘large cocoon which envelops the individual in a soft wool warmth of fraternal love and care, developing a network of social duties and responsibilities as well as material expectations and communal safeguards’ (Nkosi, 1976, 50 – 51). The cushioning effect of the emotional and psychological security inherent in the system (particularly for the care of children) remains the essential argument in favour of the extended family.

The traditional view of children in African families is that they are a blessing and that they represent an affirmation of man's continuing existence and prosperity. Often, child-birth, or the prospects of birth in a family, engenders in the old and aged a sustaining sense of relevance, continuity, and immortality. As a consequence, the tribal attitude towards childlessness is one of fear and, invariably, one of pity and rejection of the childless person, especially the childless woman.

Not only did African societies place a high premium on children but, right from birth, sustained efforts were made by the entire community, and the extended family in particular, to train the child to become a good citizen of the tribe and a good reflection of the familial home. As Brooks and Vandenbosch (1964) observed, ‘In the task of child rearing the extended (African) family was fully equipped. Through the medium of the extended family, sanctions are imposed which induce discipline, obedience to authority, respect for elders, and respect for the law of the land’ (p. 50). Uchendu (1965) made the same point and observed that the rules of traditional African society were stringent and instilled meaning and purpose in each child through stable socialising processes. Emerging empirical studies (e.g., Uka, 1966) have generally confirmed these observations. In fact, where the immediate parents were thought incapable of providing growth factors, children were usually sent to selected elders who were men and women of outstanding position and knowledge, whose function was to train the children by social maxim and direct instruction for future parenthood and adult behaviour in the tribe (Lijembe, 1967).

In contrast with what I have just described, the nature of the family in Western societies is often defined as ‘nuclear’. The nuclear system consists of the father and mother and any non-adult children from the marriage by birth or by legal adoption. Wells (1971) stated that the nuclear family system is characteristic of modern societies and that in this structure, priorities are placed on conjugal rather than on consanguineal attitudes. Each such family unit (the nuclear family) comes to be regarded for fiscal and child-rearing purposes as a separate unit.

This distinction between Western and African families is not so clear-cut now because hitherto unrecognised extended family behaviours have been ‘discovered’ in these industrialised societies (Sussman, 1959; Sussman and Burchinal, 1962). In fact, recent studies of such alternative lifestyles in
Western societies as communes and religious cults (e.g., Cox, 1977), together with studies of family functioning as opposed to family structure (e.g., Young & Willmott, 1962; Litwak, 1965) have been interpreted as reflecting a pervasive desire for extended relationships in Western societies. Indeed, these studies reveal that where the consanguineal extended family is unavailable, extended family type behaviours are often observed to evolve between unrelated persons (Wells, 1971). In effect, in Western societies, extended family behaviours and attitudes are the rule, not the exception. The significant difference between African notions of family and Western attitudes may, in fact, lie in the extent to which these primordial feelings of attachment are openly acknowledged and utilised (Uzoka, 1979). Nonetheless, the essential point regarding the emphasis placed on extended family relationships in African societies and the openly acknowledged value of the extended family in traditional child-rearing, remains valid.

Some Effects of Industrialisation and Urbanisation in Africa

The assumption is often made that unless some active intervention is undertaken, the movement in Africa would, inevitably, be towards the creation of functionally nuclear families which industrialised nations are purported to have adopted as a consequence of industrialisation. One cannot escape the conclusion that with regard to the urban African family, this prediction would appear to have substantial merit. This need not be so. As some investigations (e.g., Greenfield, 1961) have shown, industrial growth, if properly managed, can occur without the nuclear stratification of families (i.e., the nuclear family is not an unavoidable concomitant of technological growth). Nonetheless, the reality in Africa is that the demands of urban living are increasingly placing limitations on the possible range of interactions between family members. Also, copying Western ways is one of the tragedies of the prevailing lust for modernisation. It seems imperative, therefore, that psychologists in Africa should seriously ponder the effects of these anticipated and on-going changes on family life and on children.

Child Rearing becomes a nuclear family affair

One of the major consequences of industrial growth and urbanisation is that child rearing, which used to be a community affair, now becomes a ‘husband and wife’ affair. The supportive role of grandparents and neighbours is being lost. Previously, in traditional close-knit societies, there was no lack of supportive or corrective influence for the child. All available adults and even older siblings assumed parental roles. Such a process was feasible since social goals, norms, and mores were fairly stable and consistent. Currently, the demands of urban living, confounded by the multipli-
city of the ethnic origins of city dwellers, lead to the absence of kin support in essential parental functions, and the intervention of neighbours in the care of children is now considered as meddling.

Absence of clear-cut mores and child rearing goals

To confound the issue, the situation of mass living, induced by industrial growth, is demolishing the guidelines previously adhered to by those involved in child rearing. One interesting example of the parenting mores of African traditional societies is the fact that responsibility training is initiated quite early (Busia, 1969). For example, a five to six-year-old boy is often encouraged to carry something (however small) to the farm and to potter around the farm while the older men of the family work. Also, a five-year-old girl is usually thought capable of fetching fire (burning charcoal) from the adjoining compound. More important, older children are quickly taught to take care of their younger siblings, the overall intention being to instill competence in the child as well as responsibility commensurate with age. Furthermore, this child rearing process emphasises a relational ethic which constantly reminds the child of its responsibility to the family and to the social system. This relational ethic eschews hard core individualism (Mbiti, 1969; Onyewuenyi, 1978). On the other hand, the goal of child rearing in industrialised societies emphasises individualism, and the young child is quickly steered towards so-called personal autonomy and independence from the primary network. The traditional African insistence on the achievement of competence, by involving the child in participatory work activities with the family, is aimed at enhancing the child's feeling of belonging to the family and kin group through contributing its quota to the functional efficiency of the family. This is certainly different from the Western practice where, on occasion, children have been paid for taking out the garbage!

However, in urban African settings, the impact of technology and the fact of the heterogeneity of tribal origins have not enhanced the retention of tribal mores. In fact, one recent study indicates that urban parents (particularly the emerging middle class) are increasingly moving away from the goal of instilling competence in their children because, by employing household help, their children are often precluded from household responsibilities, and they often develop apathy to house-work (Ogunshola, 1973). Also, urban parents are under pressure to train their children to acquire the independence and individuality supposedly demanded by modern technology. Yet, these self same parents are not totally immune to the influence of their extended kin who constantly advocate traditional mores as the 'proper' format for child rearing (Lijembe, 1961).

Because of the prevailing confusion, parents are in a quandary as to how to raise their children, and neither national nor ethnic goals provide any
meaningful cohesive guidelines or philosophical basis for inculcating values in the children. This state of affairs in which traditional mores and values are being abandoned and Western values are only haphazardly adopted has led to what Lijembe (1967) described as raising children 'in the valley between'.

The *valley between* represents the admixture of Western and African values and the point at issue is that no one has clearly defined the proper mixture to which those in charge of rearing the future generations should adhere. In this state of parental uncertainty, children must, necessarily, grow up devoid of a unified conception of their world. They grow up with doubts and apprehensions. They grow up with inconsistent views of themselves and of their social system.

*A Vacuum in Child-rearing*

Although I have stated that the task of parenting is often left to the husband and wife nexus, this is, in fact, not quite true. The truth is that the demands of industrial growth are increasingly forcing both parents to work. Furthermore, because of the drive towards mass education (an essential goal) and the changing role of women, *stable* household help in urban settings is becoming a thing of the past. In essence, make-shift arrangements are often made to help the absentee parents until the school system takes over, when teachers take on the major parenting tasks. Because day-care centres are practically non-existent, we are moving to a state of affairs where no one, with a stable enough status, parents the children, especially the underage ones.

*Locus of Responsibility for Parenting*

A significant aspect of the current dilemma is that the seat of responsibility for child rearing is somewhat uncertain. In traditional society, responsibility for child rearing clearly inhered in the extended family with some social groupings playing meaningful secondary roles (e.g., the age grades, cults, etc.). In industrialised societies, responsibility for child rearing is usually thought to reside in the nuclear family (Wells, 1971). Notable departures from this ideal include the Kibbutzim in Israel and the Children's collectives (or Crèches and Kindergartens) in the USSR (Bar-Yosef, 1959; Spiro, 1958; Fediaevsky, 1936). In both of these departures, state organised parental-surrogates take on the major role of raising children while the parents work. These departures notwithstanding, the evidence is that the notion that child-rearing in industrialised societies (particularly in the West) is a nuclear family affair appears to be a misrepresentation. Empirical investigations have revealed extensive patterns of mutual aid between kin including, interestingly, assistance by the older factions of the family to the young nuclear family in caring for children (Sussman, 1959; Sussman, 1965; Litwak, 1959; Sharp and Axelrod, 1956). It would seem to me
that it is, in fact, in urban African situations that the function of parenting is increasingly devolving on the nuclear family. Because of long distances from the village and poor communications (with the resultant separation from the extended network), the multiplicity of ethnic origins, and the absence of any organised child care centres, the nuclear household is obliged to cater for itself, independently. It is true that tribal associations flourish in urban centres. However, their aims are often limited to providing mutual support in job seeking, burials and weddings, rather than the provision of stable support for child care (Parkin, 1969; Okonjo, 1967). One could speculate that it is this prevailing uncertainty as to the locus of responsibility for child rearing that gives rise to the constant bickering as to who is responsible for the ‘declining morals’ in which the church, parents, and the schools are often singled out for comment.

**Problems in Mental Health**

Busia (1956) identified several social and psychological problems associated with the disruption of the existing social order in Africa. These include disorganised and unstable marriages, destitution, lack of proper parenting, delinquency, the collapse of social morality, and lack of social discipline. These factors are clearly in evidence in African societies today. Ballandier (1956) also noted that rapid social change (which causes the disintegration of the family) often results in increased neurotic and psychotic symptomatology both in adults and in children. Recently, Lambo (1978) confirmed these observations and indicated that ‘with the disruption of family units we have begun to see clinical problems that once were rare, severe depression, obsessional neuroses and emotional incapacity’ (p. 37). Obviously, the disruption of the family, especially the parenting mores of the family, due to the effects of haphazard importation of modern technology without proper social planning, places the African parent in a predicament and equally places the African child in a predicament in which his future is uncertain because of the absence of a firm and decisive attitude toward child rearing.

This appraisal of the negative effects of technology does not imply that the fruits of technology should be abandoned. However, if we attend to and understand the negative psychological effects of technology on families and on children we can, at least, begin to make the necessary efforts to mitigate these effects. For example, calls often made for the massive transfer of technology to Africa must be measured alongside the impact of such a

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1. See, for example, Okechukwu Chiakwelu’s article titled ‘Needed: A Crash Programme of Industrialization’ in the *Nigerian Weekly Star* of 4 June, 1978, in which he states *inter alia:* ‘The crash programme should . . . abrogate the present government practice of slow and cautious approach to industry and formulate the means of *launching the nation into full-scale industrialization, now*’ (Italics mine). These calls are not to be taken lightly since they indicate the mood of emerging technocrats and policy makers.
move on the family, especially on the children. Of necessity, authors of
social policy must be persuaded to constantly measure the impact on family
life of various intensities of planned technological advancement.

**Crucial Imperatives**

Having explored the problems, I wish to suggest that psychologists, and
social scientists in general, have important choices to make regarding social
order in African societies if meaning is to be preserved. Psychologists in
Africa cannot pay lip service to the need for a new attitude to the family and
children. It is necessary to express awareness of the importance of the family
in child rearing by making clear-cut choices. These choices are philosophi-
cal, practical, and educational. I will now briefly examine each aspect.

**Philosophical Choices**

Social scientists must, I believe, contribute to the determination of the kind
of society anticipated for the future. It is the nature of societal goals that
will determine how the children will be raised. Children cannot be raised in
a philosophical vacuum or, more correctly, they cannot be properly raised
in the kind of philosophical confusion which now exists. In this context, it is
my belief that the largely communal lifestyle of most African societies is
based on a fundamental philosophical attitude toward existence. The
African concept of man is based, essentially, on the notion of human inter-
dependence. The so-called individuality of Western peoples has very little
relevance to Africans. Meaning and reality for the African as Lambo (1978)
correctly points out, ‘rests on the relationships between one human being
and another, and between all people and spirits’, ancestral and otherwise.
Lambo further points out that in spite of its high material achievements, the
benefits of modern technology do not satisfy the basic yearnings of indu-
trialised peoples. In fact, the emergence of tribal unions and associations in
urban African settings, has been recognised as reflecting this pre-eminent
Unfortunately, as indicated earlier, these associations do not provide child
rearing support.

In effect, in so far as one can speak of a unified African philosophical
attitude toward existence, one can rightly conceive of the African world
view as one in which ‘being your brother’s keeper’ is a fundamental tenet.
Onyewuenyi (1978) affirmed this point and indicated that in African philo-
sophical thought, ‘being is dynamic’ and that ‘existence-in-relation sums up
the African conception of life and reality’ (p. 254). Based on this philo-
sophical perspective, Onyewuenyi argued that the tribal African is never alone
but feels himself ‘a cog in a wheel of interacting forces’, such that the most
important factor in his actions is 'not how it affects him personally, but how it affects the world order outside of which he is meaningless and non-existing' (p. 254).

African societies appear to be losing these philosophical bearings. As a result, children are being raised in a manner that is totally divorced from the philosophical view which was the bedrock of traditional African social order. If this anomaly is to be rectified, social policies must be directed towards re-stating and reinforcing these fundamental philosophical tenets which, in my view, are still relevant and useful. In fact, even in Western societies, the negation of the concept of inter-dependence in their philosophy, as manifested in their current notions of individual freedom ('doing your own thing'), is now in considerable disrepute. Sociologist Phillipe Ariès captured the essence of this current disaffection when he stated:

The evolution of the last few centuries has often been presented as the triumph of individualism over social constraints, with the family counted among the latter. But, where is the individualism in these modern lives, in which all the energy of the couple is directed to serving the interests of a deliberately restricted posterity? (1962, 7).

Perhaps it is worthwhile to re-emphasise that the notion that industrialised Western individuals function in isolated and atomistic nuclear families is a myth (Sussman & Burchinal, 1962). The fact is that when given the choice (i.e., when unhampered by social pressures to conform to the Western mythical ideal of family), Western peoples generally prefer and do live 'extended' lifestyles. The myth of the nuclear family which was paraded for so long as the Western prototype of living continues to pose serious psychological consequences for Western peoples (Uzoka, 1979). The irony is that Western peoples are currently re-discovering the incalculable values of openly acknowledged 'extended' human relations (with the extended family as the major element?) at a time when Africans appear to be questioning and abandoning these self same values! Psychologists and other social scientists must, therefore, actively help in resuscitating the important aspects of African philosophy about existence. In this manner, psychologists and other social scientists can begin to contribute in a fundamental and meaningful way to fashioning the world in which to raise the African child by providing guidelines for development programmes in African contexts.

**Practical Choices**

Arising from the philosophical perspective just presented, the psychologist in Africa will have to make practical choices, and these include active advo-

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2. The increasing popularity of communes and religious cults is another feature of the current manifestation of the 'extended' orientation among Western peoples. Cox (1977) provides an interesting analysis of this Western phenomenon.
cacy for the extended family, advocacy for children, and a general advocacy for the African way of life. For example, there should evolve strong advocacy for social policies which seek to inculcate in the people the awareness that they are expected to be in contact with their neighbours and to be able to resolve conflicts which necessarily arise from such contacts through mediation and reconciliation as was the case in traditional African societies. This 'neighbour-contact' philosophy is reflected in an Ibo maxim which states: 'Agbata-Obi onye bu nwanne ya' (literally, 'one's neighbour is one's kin'). This functional relatedness is of course consistent with the fundamental African concept of human interdependence. Within this format, quarrels between neighbours, even if some minor bodily injury is done, should be settled by social welfare agencies rather than by the police. Traditionally, by the very nature of their training, policemen tend to escalate problems and to alienate neighbours from each other, while social welfare contact often aims to defuse such interactional conflicts and problems. If neighbours can perceive each other as mutually supportive, and are capable of resolving conflicts without recourse to the police, then they will entrust their children to each other without apprehension. In so doing, children will, again, be returned to the care of the whole community (including the neighbours), rather than the present style of leaving the entire responsibility to the nuclear family. Neighbours will, again, become partners in the process of rearing children and future generations will become secure in the knowledge that even their neighbours were their caretakers. Future generations will, thereby, acquire a sense of responsibility towards their neighbours and towards the social system, as was fostered by traditional child rearing mores and practices.

Educational Choices

Current education is often geared towards instilling skill and technical know-how. This is because, as Busia (1969) indicated, there has been a 'tendency to see development solely in materialistic terms — in roads, harbours, buildings, factories and the like'. Busia further observed that this factor often 'obsures the fact that the aim of securing these things is to create the environmental conditions which will give every individual the best chance of developing his talent and personality to the fullest extent possible, so that he may be as good a human being and citizen as he can be' (Italics mine) (p. 95).

The goal of education in traditional African societies, though passed on by oral tradition, was well defined, and this has been well documented. Okafor (1974) has noted that in old African societies, acculturation or education of offspring assumed a complex dimension, but that 'one major
task of traditional education in Africa was to inculcate in the young a sense of responsibility toward their fellow human beings and the social order. Citing an example from Ibo society, Okafor noted that 'one of the greatest apprioarums a parent could encounter was to hear another making such a remark against his child: Nnwanu, azukwali ge azu? (literally: "This child, are you trained at all?")'. On the contrary, he is a proud parent who hears the remarks of 'O bu nwa azulu azu (He is a well-bred child) made about his son or daughter' (pp. 29 – 30). As a result, parents went to great pains to instill in their children socially approved moral codes and desirable behavioural patterns. This began by families encouraging the older children to be responsible for their younger siblings. This rarely happens in emerging urban situations. Increasingly, urban 'modern' children have very little experience in caring for their fellow humans. This may, in part, account for the diminishing sense of responsibility and an increasing sense of indifference towards law and order.

Education in Africa, to be relevant, must, therefore, be based on the three factors of morality, responsibility, and caring about relationships. Such an educational format must include what Busia (1969) termed the 'sensitive awareness of community' (p. 105). No other framework will satisfy the yearnings of African peoples, and psychologists must be in the front line in advocating the evolution of such a framework for our educational process. In addition to all this, psychologists should seriously address themselves to the development of support systems (the training of school counsellors, development of worthwhile day care centres, etc.) which will enhance the overall development of the African child.

It is perhaps even more important, in my view, for psychologists to advance research aimed at identifying critical psychological variables in extended family contexts which make for particular developmental patterns. Those variables which are found to be consistent with the philosophy of human interdependence will then be advocated as cornerstones of African parenting mores, value orientation, and the foundations of an educational process designed specifically for the African context. For example, in view of the fact that the early acquisition of personal competencies and a sense of responsibility to others are cardinal features of African traditional child rearing mores, it would seem appropriate to examine these factors in the light of imminent psychological theories and to see which of these theories are relevant to African needs. White's (1959) concept of competence is an interesting example. White, basing his theory on such commonplace observations as a young child insisting on feeding itself when its hunger would more easily be satisfied by having the mother place the food in its mouth, theorised that while the hunger drive is an important determinant of behaviour, the child's need to manipulate objects and attain mastery over them is a far more significant factor in the individual's development. According

3. The Ibos are Nigerian ethnic groups.
to White, a child’s acquisition of a variety of skills reflects an inherent motive in children to explore and gain mastery over the environment. As such, competence motivation is a significant element in the formation of personality and the ultimate development of the individual. Empirical studies examining White’s proposition have generally supported his position (e.g., Teeter et al., 1964). Clearly, this theoretical format provides an attractive model for examining and understanding aspects of traditional African parenting mores, and perhaps for re-establishing these mores if they are still considered functionally relevant.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to draw attention to the importance of the family in raising children. A significant aspect of the current dilemma is that African parents are increasingly moving away from authentic African view-points about existence, without instituting meaningful alternatives. As a result of this cultural and philosophical confusion, children are now raised without clearly defined goals, and uncertainty prevails. The effects of this uncertainty are seen in the increasing alienation of our young from the social order. If it is recognised that the family evolved primarily for the nurturing of the young, in the service of perpetuating the species, then social scientists need to advocate such social conditions as will enable families perform their task of child rearing effectively. There is need to ensure, through proper emphasis on the importance of the family and its extended network (which includes the neighbours), that the increasing rapidity of technological growth does not weaken the sense of responsibility of families for the socialisation of the young. In effect, social scientists should be persistent in their advocacy for parenting strategies that are consistent with the African world view. The answer to Africa’s dilemma is that authors of social policy at all levels must be made constantly aware of the impact of their decisions and plans on the infra-structure of society — the family.

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