



## The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 19  
Issue 2 June

Article 10

May 1992

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### Recommended Citation

Maher, Thomas F. (1992) "The Withering of Community Life and the Growth of Emotional Disorders," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 19 : Iss. 2 , Article 10.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol19/iss2/10>

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# The Withering of Community Life and the Growth of Emotional Disorders

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*The architecture of this essay is as follows: I begin by assaying the communitarian crisis of the modern western world. Second, I offer a brief narrative of the social and cultural variables that foster rootlessness and social disintegration in much of urban industrial life. Third, I state a strong case for how this same process may be systematically undermining the nuclear family as a life-long community, threatening the dependence of children on care-giving adults, and, thereafter, the psychological development of children.*

“Plants have roots, spiders have webs and people have relationships.”

Blake

Communitarian critiques of the modern Western world have endeavored to analyze the distinctive social transformation brought about by materialism, endless economic growth, and unbridled economic competition. This line of criticism is essentially linked to the economic and political structures which have developed in the last centuries. A Platonic-Romantic moral sense of the good is used to evaluate the shifts in moral consciousness and definitions of moral aspirations which flow from the privatization of individuals and the withering of communities of common life and ritual. Communitarian thought shares a critical assessment of the philosophical and economic doctrines defining individuals as having priority over any conception of social morality.

One of the most enduring legacies of nineteenth century romantic criticism of the Industrial Revolution is the concept of human alienation, which is echoed by the youthful, intellectual

Marx. The theme of romanticism is fully and qualitatively summarized in the *Communist Manifesto*.

Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at least compelled to face, with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind. (Tucker, 1972, pp. 337–338)

I want to explore these themes to determine whether the communitarian crisis is undermining the nuclear family as a life-long community and thereby threatening the dependence of children on caregiving adults. First, I shall sketch a portrait of the premodern world. Next, I shall trace the historical and cultural variables that foster rootlessness and social disintegration in much of urban industrial life, and consider the ways in which this same process may be systematically eroding family ties and thereafter the psychological development of children.

For all the differences of origin and country, premodern communities evidence some common characteristics. A person's frame of reference for the formation of values equaled the standard of society at large. People who lived in classical Greece ultimately defined concepts such as will, integrity, and freedom in the context of the social order. For the Greeks, freedom was concomitant with the notion of human interaction. They saw themselves as members of an ongoing and historical community, sharing the same norms, institutions, gods, and cultural activities. There was little distinction between personal values and community norms. Plato's ideal was for the individual to honor the established social morality of the city, its ethical life. The harmony of Greek life was expressed by the dependence of the individual on his society and the way in which its norms and customs imposed a complex of obligations, as the culture wove an integrative web of spiritual and communal values around the individual and his practical concerns. The essence of the person was not his psychological states and dispositions; it was rather the socialized person who was the essential individual.

Liberty in this tradition pertained to the right to participate in the transcendent life of the polis or community life.

The premodern world of predictability and tradition created a strong sense of community at the local level. Traditional consciousness emphasized the continuity between present and past and minimized social change. Such a system obviously enhanced the sense of common concerns within these communities. In a world that was overwhelmingly rural, village life comprised a socially and culturally homogeneous group, whose common values were formed and repeatedly reinforced by their continuous association and shared experience, at first within the family and then outside in their church and community. In such a community of life and ritual, the whole group moved together through the cycle of reproduction, labor, achievement, celebration, and mourning.

Out of this tradition, community interests dictated that the fortunes of the civil society took precedence over the personal advantage of the individual. Prior to the modern age, the accumulation of wealth was inhibited by an ethical attitude that declared the purpose of work to provide for the basic necessities of life and discourage idleness and concupiscence. In the then religious world, objects of human manufacture were adorned with symbols and emblems charged with moral significance. In most societies, material accumulation and exchange was subjugated to social goals. Exchanges were used more for solidarity than for profit, as economic growth and greed were contained by cultural and moral values.

Demos's (1970) psycho-social reconstruction of family experience in Plymouth colony demonstrated a general premodern pattern whereby the family and the wider community were joined in multiple activities of profound reciprocity. For example, family productive activity was characterized by economic relations that were antecedently limited by communal tradition and custom. Production was primarily geared to subsistence. Families accumulated productive surplus, but not at the expense of their communal obligations towards their neighbors. To foster good will in the community, annual surpluses were exchanged with a pool of friends and neighbors (Macfarlane, 1970). As the historian Medick wrote: "The family continued to work until its

subsistence was assured. It then gave in to leisure and worked to satisfy additional material or cultural needs which always took precedence over an expenditure to work to gain a purely monetary surplus" (Medick, 1981, p. 66). Work, free time, sociability, culture, morality, and economy were virtually indivisible. Work was not yet a means to an end.

Within the family, physical and emotional needs, work and pleasure were coterminous with one another. There was little distinction between the shares of labor and income that each member contributed to the maintenance of the family. While households were divided along gender lines, the fact that tasks were sex-linked did not contradict reciprocal dependence. Farm work required husband and wife be indispensable to each other.

Yet the family was more than an economic unit. Here are several generalizations, again from Demos (1970), that apply to the family wherever found in early America. It was a productive enterprise, a vocational institute, a house of correction, a church, and a welfare institution. Throughout the seventeenth and into the eighteenth centuries, parents reared their children with love and affection, to love and to fear them, and to hate pleasure and their bodies, and to subordinate their wills and selves to their parents (Greven, 1977). Parental love and affection was the norm.

A collective interest in socializing the young prevailed. Neighbors, the church, and a set of clear cultural values provided social and psychological support for families and their responsibilities for child rearing. Demos's observations showed that the family was joined to other institutions and other purposes in an intricate web of interconnections: "Family and community, private and public life, formed part of the same moral equation. The one supported the other, and they became in a sense indistinguishable" (Demos, 1970, p. 186).

However, as people were pulled into the modern world of capitalism, the reciprocal relationship between individuals and their solid social formations were metamorphosed into something unrecognizable. Historians have scrupulously documented and narrated an epochal transformation over the last three centuries in personal values, communal interdependencies, and personalistic social bonds. The organic conception of the whole

in which the sum remains greater than its parts began losing ground to the conception of the whole as the sum of its individual parts.

The growth of a market economy ripped apart the mold of custom and the usages of tradition. The manufacturing economy extended itself endlessly, creating the first truly materialistic culture. The Protestant work ethic was transformed from its original concern of glorifying God to a new telos: increasing individual material prosperity and that of society. In the developing secular world, private interests were released from moral constraints and communal regulation of economic activity. By the mid-nineteenth century, the classical republicanism attempt to maintain a delicate balance between economic individualism and traditional communal values gave way to the disruptive force of an expanding economy. To use Carlyle's (Tennyson, 1984) words, the "cash nexus" was diffusing and deepening its grip upon the social order. The ideal of the opportunistic enterpriser, instead of civic minded persons dedicated to the common good, had become the model for the community to emulate (Berthoff, 1982). The profit motive and unappeasable greed, as ubiquitous characteristics of society, became a modern phenomenon.

The individual was removed from the old integrated forms of community. Vigorous communities by which people formerly identified themselves lost a sense of autonomy. As the maximization of private profit and economic growth became the foundation of government policy, economic enterprises and productive activity became disembedded and independent from the community. In a sense, the contemporary Western world detached itself from the past. The economic system came to operate as an amoral quasi-autonomous sphere. The cult of efficiency and competition fostered a practical life-world dominated by technical rationality (Habermas, 1975; 1984), gradually replacing the set of rules, mores, customs, and habitual practices that had traditionally guided people's behavior. A world disenchanting in Max Weber's language, a world without an objective moral order was constructed.

Gradually the moral economy of the past is replaced by a new foundational commitment to individual equality under

the law and the postulate of economic and individual freedom. The privileging of equality operates to exclude not only permanent inequalities of status but also ascriptions of authoritative opinion to any person within society. Freedom thus becomes a natural right, because no one is deemed to have the right to impose opinions by virtue of his or her intrinsic identity. Without a bonding link or form of social cohesion, freedom allows the individual to choose his own aims, values, and conceptions of the good. Individuals are now free to view themselves as a distinct entity, and society comes to consist of disassociated individuals, each with an ontological ground of his or her conception of the good life. After all, the increased prominence of individualism undermines membership in a community, whether in a tribe, village, city, nation, or family. For the self-defining individual, social arrangements are a necessary burden to be pursued only for egotistic ends. Community for the first time is external to the individuals who comprise it, an attribute and not constituent of their identity. The true dependence of the individual upon the surrounding community is denied.

The change from one socio-economic system to another deprived families of their economic independence. Large-scale manufacture separated the household from the traditional place of work. Such a cessation of household and the place of work necessarily entailed a pattern of sexual-economic division. Wives were excluded from the publicly recognized economy and largely confined to that part of life which was private and personal. This social and economic division of labor replaced traditional sexual interdependency with sexual polarity.

During the nineteenth century, the socialization of children is differentiated between father and mother in a much sharper way. Within a minute period of history, the father goes from his historic superordinate role as a concerned, involved parent within the family to his new role as a subordinate worker subjected to a system of rules and to a hierarchy of power. "Now for the first time," to quote Demos (1986, p. 52), "the central activity of fatherhood was sited outside one's immediate household. Now, being fully a father meant being separated from one's children for a considerable part of every working day." Socialization is left to the mother.

In the process, adults trade the sociability of medieval public life for the privacy of family life. The family, as persons, surfaces as an individualistic unit. Philippe Aries' (1962) incisive historical analysis of the reciprocal relations between the family and the wider community shows that the motor of industrialization gives the family a more private and individualistic nature. Emotions, as the family withdraws from the public world, are no longer diffuse—with numerous foci— but focused, almost exclusively, on the domestic unit. The family becomes “the private domain, the only place where a person could legitimately escape the inquisitive stare of industrial society” (Aries, 1979, pp. 40–41).

Since World War II, the family has become isolated in a very comprehensive and almost totalizing sense. Relative to its neighbors and immediate surroundings, the family is much more self-contained than the great majority of any previous generation of urban dwellers, and incomparably more so than most villagers of previous ages. With the cult of domestic privatism being implemented, the social dialogue and neighborliness associated in the past with the much-used front porch, life of the sidewalk, and the front yard vanishes (Jackson, 1985). Neighborhoods, as places to find friendship, identity, and support, have generally disappeared from the American scene (Fisher, 1982) and parenting is now a lonely undertaking (Maher, 1987).

With the coming of the modern era, the role of the family undergoes still another change. It has, Aries (1964) explains, paradoxically, become a repository for the waning cultural heritage of the traditional world, a refuge for values and custom which are passing. Yet Laslett (1979), together with Aries and Demos, concludes that the loneliness of the modern family has created undue stress from which it cannot recover. Thus, according to Laslett, “changes . . . in the ideology of family life and the relationship of the family to other social institutions have affected the process of socialization in ways that have increased the salience of the family in the formation of personal identity” (Laslett, 1979, p. 250). Accordingly, Macfarlane, who has made a monumental contribution towards the understanding of the social history of the British family, shows that the development of the market economy from medieval to modern times has left



the family in a spiritual and cultural vacuum. The prime moral feature of the commodity economy, as Macfarlane explains, is that: "In its wake come all the associated costs: the destruction of wider groups and communities, the corrosion of loyalties, the calculative, rational view of life, the 'alienation' which Marx documented, the 'anomie' that Durkheim analyzed" (Macfarlane, 1986, pp. 343-344).

In disowning the characterological and community-directed norms of traditional culture, modern society shows how it is possible to alter sacred commitments. Middle-class family members exist in the moral world of mass consumerism far removed from local tradition and are at odds with the earlier emphasis on self-denial. With the privatization of God, secularization of society, and prominence of commercialism in society, the social meaning of marriage and sexuality has been dramatically reconceptualized.

Looking back at puritan New England, sexuality was primarily linked with reproduction within a family context. There was an emphasis on commitment, acceptance of social attachment, self-sacrifice, and libidinal restraint. But as more and more forms of social life became increasingly commercialized, a philosophy of consumption which encouraged immediate self-gratification and the pursuit of pleasure was established. Beginning in the nineteenth century, sexuality could no longer be contained within marriage, as the marketplace sanctioned the release of desire in so many directions, including the libidinous.

For many people of different classes, life's needs and meanings now focus on the aspiration of sharing in the enlarged scope of human desires that is espoused by the consumer society. There exists today a split between the older ethic of conjugality as a public duty, and the newer dream of sexuality as a private, personal pleasure. With the severing of sex from associative bonds and reproductive life, sexuality becomes a private interest related to personal identity, happiness, and development (D'Emilio & Freedman, 1988).

The family, as Orr (1979) maintains, must attempt to compensate for family members' unmet needs in society. It provides a therapeutic function which purports to serve psychological man or woman. To this ever-widening preoccupation with the

self and its inner recesses, family life must be interesting enough to meet the modern individual's needs or else the family member will seek fulfillment in the marketplace. In this context contemporary family life acquires a negative image:

Seen from this viewpoint, domestic relationships look dangerously like an encumbrance, if not a form of bondage, inhibiting the quest for a full experience of self. Monogamous marriage is liable to become boring and stultifying: in other things, after all, variety is the "spice of life." Moreover, the responsibility for children only compounds the problem. The needs and requirements of the young are so pressing, so constant, as to leave little space for adults who must attend to them. "Spice" and "space": these are, in fact, the qualities for which we yearn most especially. And the family severely limits our access to either one. (Demos, 1986, p. 37).

As a result, the security of children becomes increasingly precarious as parental involvement becomes tenuous. About one-half of children in the United States will experience their parents' marital dissolution. For many children the emotional aftermath is traumatic. Almost a third of the children become clinically depressed and function poorly in their school and social life. Many children seem to adjust initially, only to erupt later with problems of anger, promiscuity, depression, fears of betrayal or abandonment (Wallerstein & Blakeulee, 1988). There is also devastating economic and social consequences of divorce for female household heads of all classes and their children. Mother-headed families are frequently below or near the poverty line (Fuchs, 1986; Weitzman, 1985).

Throughout western civilization material deprivation has negatively impacted private human relations and loosened parental-child bonds. The relationship between emotional needs and material interest have historically been the complementary foundation of family solidarity. In the practical experience of family formation and the dynamics of social reproduction, the emotional and material are systematically interconnected. Emotion, trust, and sentiment are structured within the necessity of providing predictable material resources to manage those needs within society (Medick & Saben, 1984). For example, in the ancient world and into the eighteenth century, parents, although

they cared deeply about their children, abandoned their offspring in desperation when they were unable to support them (Boswell, 1988). Today many of our nation's citizens live in an equally unstable economic situation that creates a similar dissociated impact on parental-child relations.

Wilson (1987), who has written probably the most important book on poverty to appear in the 1980s, has documented how inequalitarian pressures bear down disproportionately on minorities to precipitate a communitarian crisis for many black people. The relocation of industry to the suburban periphery or to cities of newly industrialized countries has removed poor minorities from meaningful job opportunities. Minorities have become geographically concentrated in a dual city, one affluent and the other poor and peripheral. This new underclass lives now in economically and socially isolated communities outside the mainstream of social and economic life, removed from both the black and white middle class.

Wilson's main conclusion is that poverty has become more intractable for reasons partially cultural and psychological. With the growing bifurcation of the black community, the cohesiveness and texture of their community has been gravely broken. The "marriageable male pool" (the proportion of young black men in position financially to marry and support a family) declines as young black male employment sharply decreases. Poor black families become increasingly headed by young women dependent on very poor wages in the lowest rungs of the service sector, or on welfare.

The well-being of children, according to Wilson, is at risk. Children are being raised in an institutionless community, where everyone is poor, instability is the norm, and the social and psychological role of fatherhood is nonexistent. Adolescent mothers generally lack psychological maturity to be a "good enough parent." They consistently show poor patterns of interaction with their infants, spending less time talking to them, looking at them, and interacting in rewarding ways (Osofsky & Culp, 1987), interfering with the social and emotional development of the child, making later development potentially problematic (Osofsky & Eberhart-Wright, 1988).

For those left behind, the inner city is dim, claustrophobic, and utterly hopeless. A large-scale study in London showed frighteningly high rates of depression in unemployed women living at home with young children, rates as high as 40% among the working-class mothers (Brown & Harris, 1978). A demoralized, apathetic and depressed mother deprives the child of the mother's vital constitutive attachment and empathic care. Children with depressed mothers, Winnicott (1958, p. 93) writes, "have a task which can never be accomplished. Their task is first to deal with the mother's mood." Several major studies show that depression in the primary caregiver is the most prevalent etiological factor in episodic psychiatric disorders in children (Cytryn & McKnew, 1980; Beardslee, Keller, & Klerman, 1983).

At first glance, the removal of production from community and family life creates the appearance of a "public" world removed from interpersonal relations and, allegedly, concerned only with relations of capital and production. However, a deeper contemporary analysis of the family does not support the theory of a public/private dichotomy, but, alternatively, suggests a dialectal interplay between the relationship conditions of the family and the impact of the material conditions of economic activity. To illustrate, Lasch (1979) and Donzelot (1979) depict a breakdown in the privatism of both realms as having significantly affected the traditional institutions which were the extended supportive environment of the family. Institutions that had previously placed high value on the importance of reciprocity, mutual obligation, and solidarity at the social level are no longer available to perform this critical function. Mediating institutions such as the church, neighborhood groups, and associations have succumbed to the encroachment of managerial bureaucracies with the accompanying deterioration of the historic moral and practical functions of community. The family, which appears to be private, is exposed to the public domain through channels which bypass the immediate community. Professionals now take responsibility for functions previously performed in a family and community context. This further weakens primary ties of mutual interdependence on which the character structure of men, women, and children ultimate

depend. The conservative theorist Murray (1988) highlights the loss of community relations:

Communities exist because they have a reason to exist, some core of functions around which the affiliations that constitute a vital community can form and grow. When the government takes away a core function, it depletes not only the source of vitality pertaining to that particular function, but also the vitality of a much larger family of responses. (1988, p. 274)

The feminization of poverty, the marginality of the economic security of the working class, the loss of enduring social units, the strains explicit in the loneliness of parenting, and the changing sexual composition of the work force all undermine the family's ability to function as a viable psychologically and emotionally supportive structure for children. For the most of human history, the relationship between mother and infant was characterized by very close physical contact. Indeed, breast feeding assured close physical and emotional ties between women and their babies for several years. In contrast, contemporary children sleep in separate rooms and are fed by bottle. If the mother works away from the home, then some other and more differentiated form of child-rearing must develop for the care of children. Half of all women with preschool children work, and half of those employed mothers have at least one child below the age of 12 months in the care of comparable strangers during the day, a new social phenomenon.

While the effects of day care on toddlers is controversial, the more recent research raises concern about nonparental day care before the child's 12th and 18th month. Belsky (1986), who has studied the issue of day care for over a generation, reviewed the most recent studies on the adequacy of attachment at one year of age and its sequelae. He concluded that day care instituted during the first year of life constitutes a "risk factor" for the development of not only secure attachment at age 1, but also of heightened aggressiveness, noncooperation with adults, and withdrawal later in childhood.

All children need constitutive attachments. The crystallization of the child's psychic structure and affective states takes place within the context of external relations with the child's

primary attachment figures. A "good enough" parent-infant mutuality is necessary for the infant's subsequent psychological growth and development. The child requires a developmental milieu that provides certain essential nurture, structure, and socialization to enable him or her to develop into a psychologically mature person. The genesis of normal or pathological development is inextricably intertwined with family relations. What is most distinctive about children is that they are associational beings dependent upon the social relations of bounded and bonded community.

On the other hand, deprivation of deep and profound emotional ties in infancy may cause lifetime developmental damage to the child's later capacities for social competence (Sroufe, 1983; Lutkenhaus, Grossmann, & Grossmann, 1985), peer relationships and social functioning (Bates, Maslin, & Frankel, 1985), creating and sustaining human bonds and social concern (Grossman, Spangler, Suess, & Unzner, 1985; Ricks, 1985). In the same vein, feelings of loneliness are significantly associated with one's perceived early attachment relationships to parents (Shaver & Hazen, 1985), a factor in the alienation that underlies teenage alcoholism, drug abuse, and suicide (Lidz, 1976). To summarize, Selma Fraiberg writes:

The distinguishing characteristic of the diseases of non-attachment is the incapacity of the person to form human bonds . . . the other striking characteristic of such people in their impoverished emotional range. There is no joy, no grief, no guilt, no remorse. In the absence of human ties, a conscience cannot be formed; even the qualities of self-observation and self-criticism fail to develop. (Fraiberg, 1977, p. 47)

It is at this point that the intrinsic value of "good enough" parenting intersects with the broader community and the social structure most clearly. The uncontrolled drive to economic growth, concentration, mobility; the exaltation of instrumental reason over history and community seriously undermine the nuclear family as a life-long community. Indeed, psychological individuality, as a developmental achievement, is becoming increasingly problematic. In recent years, a number of social scientists and psychiatrists have noted the increased prevalence and

proliferation of emotional disorders. It seems that the internal relations of our advanced industrial society generate pervasive insecurity and rising numbers of mental health patients. For instance, the epidemiological study of historical trends in the evolution of schizophrenia in Europe suggests that schizophrenia increased sharply in the nineteenth century. Hare reviewed a number of studies and concluded that between

1859 and 1909, the total increase in the rate of insanity was 17.3 (35.8 minus 18.5); and of this, 7.1 (41%) was due to the increase in schizophrenia over and above that attributable to causes acting to increase the rate of all types of insanity. Thus, the postulated increase in the incidence of schizophrenia can account for at least 40% of the increased prevalence of insanity between 1859 and 1909. (Hare, 1988, p. 525)

Furthermore, major studies demonstrate an increase in the incidence of depression. This has been variously described as a sharp rise or epidemic. It has been suggested that the age of melancholy has replaced the age of anxiety (Hagnel, Lanke, Rorsman, & Ojesto, 1982). Most noteworthy, since World War II, is the trend of an earlier age of onset of depression for adolescents and young adults (Klerman, 1986). The epidemiologic study of psychiatric disorders in the United States demonstrates, as a leading researcher concludes, the cohort that came to maturity after World War II, i.e., born after 1936, is experiencing earlier ages of onset and increased risk of major depression (Weisman, Nyers, Leaf, Tischler, & Holzer, 1986). One large-scale community study, for example, finds that among women almost 70% have suffered a major depression by age 30, compared to 4% of those born before 1910—a 15-fold increase (Klerman, 1986). The baby boom generation, which now comprises almost one-third of the population, has experienced greater rates of depression and similar trends have been reported for suicide and substance abuse (Klerman, 1988). A frightening picture of domestic cruelty which denies children a normal sequence of development has been painted recently by Crewdson (1988). The Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter argues that the sexual abuse of children has increased dramatically since World

War II. Based on a complete examination of the available data, he estimates that nearly 38 million Americans have been sexually abused in their childhood. In the vast majority of cases, according to the experts, the abuser has been abused in childhood, and many of the new victims will also be at risk to become abusers when they become older. If this pattern continues, according to Crewdson, 13 million of our nation's children will be sexually abused before they reach their eighteenth birthday. In addition, there is a malignancy of child abuse existing today in our society that did not exist two or three centuries ago in New England. Demos summarizes his historical research on child abuse: "Most childhoods in pre-modern society knew their own forms of severity. But they seem not to have known the particular sufferings which the term 'child abuse' now calls so vividly and painfully to mind" (Demos, 1986, p. 87). The fact that child abuse is far more prevalent than in traditional non-western societies is attributed by anthropologists, in part, to the social isolation in which many families are forced to live. "Embeddedness of child rearing in larger kin and community networks," Korbin (1987, p. 32) writes, "provides assistance to parents and also helps to ensure that child care behaviors will be open to scrutiny and community standards maintained."

The psychoanalytic community has for some time been reporting a symptomatic and structural change in personality structure. The obsessional neurotic and conversion hysteric so characteristic of an earlier, more acquisitive and sexually repressed society, have been all but eclipsed by a plethora of character disorders. More and more psychiatrists believe that character disorders may be the predominant mental problem of our times.

In 1954, Gitelson (1954) noted an increasing number of patients with narcissistic personality disorders. Waelder wrote:

The psychoneuroses seem to have changed since the early days of psychoanalysis, with simple and rather transparent cases of grande hysteria retreating from sophisticated urban quarters and being reported from back waters only; and, in general with repression, the simple form of defense, giving way to more complicated mechanism. (1962, p. 618)



This same observation was noted by Zetzel (1970), who contended that the "so-called good hysteric" of Freud's day was being replaced by more disturbed and difficult patients with personality disorders. The "normal personality of our culture" was described by Tarakoff (1966) as one of infantile grandiosity that is congruent with our culture's moral notions about autonomous individuality. While recognizing the enigmatic nature of etiological considerations, Lazar writes "whatever the explanation—and the question remains open—the patients [with personality disorders] I have described comprise an increasing number of those who seek . . . help" (Lazar, 1973, p. 597). And Dr. Otto Kernberg (1986), a leading theoretician in the area of pathological narcissism, very recently stated that the incidence of character disorders may be increasing.

Character disorders are the subject of controversy, given the tendency on the part of some theorists to postulate a single deficiency—caregiver unavailability, family pathology, constitutional or hereditary factors, or other early traumata—as the cause of pathology. Nevertheless, there is a growing consensus that character disorders are rooted in the intersubjective abruption of the emotional reciprocity of the caregiver-infant atonement during the separation-individuation stage of development occurring during the child's first three years of life. Mahler (1975), whose contributions to the field are seminal, stresses the unity of nature and nurture in the care giver-infant dyad and sees all of these factors—individually or in combination—as capable of undermining the "mutual cuing" requisite to the achievement of a cohesive self. Yet, she does assert that the emergence of a cohesive self depends on the gradual internalization of equilibrium-maintaining parental functions. The principal condition for mental health at the preoedipal level is the ". . . actual mother-child relationship which serves as a basis for the quality and stability of mental representations" (Mahler, Pine, & Bergman, 1975, p. 188). Internalized parental and societal delimitation is vital to the child's coherent personality organization.

The few research studies of the families of adult character disorder patients found a consistent failure on the part of the parents to provide basic nurturance, protection, or empathic

caring (Gunderson, Kerr, & Englund, 1980). In sum, parental failures, to Modell (1980), are usually those of emotional unresponsiveness.

Concordant with the representation of the human condition in much of the late twentieth-century literature, Kohut (1977, 1980), views the modern individual as a deeply damaged character whose core sense of self is devastated. The narcissistic personality of our time suffers from impairments that are characterized by insufficient psychic infrastructures which are themselves connected with inadequate experiences of internalization, identification, and idealization. The decline of parental emotional responsiveness during infantile experience, according to Kohut, is inversely related to the characterological shift in our time toward character disorders. On the one hand, character disorders result from parental emotional unresponsiveness, affective absence, and empathetic coldness. At the same time, the quality of parenthood is the result of historic psychotropic social factors that have caused a diminution of emotional interrelatedness. Parenthood both mirrors and conveys these changing social realities and cultural values, and these changes are ultimately reflected in the individual's personality configuration.

We may also talk about the differentiae of modern family crises in terms of the literature it produces; it is by our imagery of the past and present that the character of children's existential anxiety can be known. As with so many cultural developments, the last part of this century witnesses the beginnings of a changed attitude in children's literature between the relationship of parents and children. The early twentieth century imagery depicts the family as solid, stable, and secure—a perfect place of refuge. At the heart of this period of children's literature, children and parents exist within a system of mutual respect, love, and responsibility. The children in family fiction are never solitary figures but are connected to their world through their parents, brothers and sisters, neighborhood friends, and community. The authors identify one central task of growing up as the transcendence of egocentricity. MacLeod describes the goal of parenting:

The pattern of fiction encouraged children to become acquainted with their communities and their fellow human beings, to find

their place in the society beyond home. Personal growth was measured and maturity defined by a child's growing understanding of and concern for other people. (MacLeod, 1984, p. 111)

Today's authors, by contrast, convey a nihilistic, schismatic quality regarding family life, and depict an astonishing hostile attitude toward parents. Parents are not only indifferent to their children, but openly destructive. "Fathers are preoccupied with success and moneymaking; mothers are selfish, neurotic, unloving, alcoholic, or addicted to pills. If this fiction is to be believed, the contemporary American family is a shambles" (MacLeod, 1984, p. 107). Parents no longer have the interest, concern, time, ability, and will power to modify the self-centeredness of children.

Any encouragement to go outside of one's self is cautious at best, and most protagonists are, in fact, mainly preoccupied with self. Their problems, their emotions, their reactions and needs occupy the center of the literature, and neither challenge nor perspective is added by the authors. (MacLeod, 1984, p. 111)

Social problems in our age are not only associated with inequality in the domains of material reproduction but also reflect the disintegration of cultural tradition, socialization processes, and the family as an enduring way of life. Characteristic of our age is the interlocking relationship between the degree to which personal problems, the symptomatic change in the typical manifestations of mental disorders, and political problems intersect. The privatizing features of culture, which includes the decline of community ties and traditional supports, tend to increase the burden—psychological and economic—on the nuclear family. These concrete, historically specific transformations of our social order coalesce to delimit the nexus of intimate relationships on which the moral community is to be built. Support for this position is provided by the socio-psychological tendencies about the growing significance of the crises of childhood.

All factors combine to make a forceful argument that the development of the infant within the family is the point of reference for investigating the increasing rates of emotional disorders. It is here, at the interface of the child with the human community toward which he or she ineluctably moves, that the

essential, intrinsic value of parenting and nurturing is manifested most clearly. From the standpoint of the dynamic psychology of early childhood, the process of healthy development, a complex affair, is inherently dependent on a continuing personal relationship between an infant and a mother-figure. Nevertheless, these historic systemic features of contemporary society impinge upon the family to produce a change in the child's nurturing environment. Indeed, the disruptive breakdown of vigorous constitutive communities, and where the very conditions of social life have the consequences of furthering the boundless impersonality of human life, renders children's developmental progress toward the formation of a mature sense of self increasingly problematic.

Within our life world, there is a melancholy awareness of the socio-cultural loss of interdependence, cohesiveness, stability, and continuity in human relationships. The historical conditions of familial life that once fostered the process of internalization and individuation have all but been eclipsed by the depersonalization of social relations today. Should the family dissolve emotionally as a "haven in the heartless world," it will do so not because it has exhausted its ubiquitous nurturing purpose but because it exists in a world grown alien to its traditional values.

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