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# Parents, Caregivers, and Peers

## Patterns of Complementarity in the Social World of Children in Rural Madagascar

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Gabriel Scheidecker

Research on childhood in anthropology and neighboring disciplines has continuously broadened the range of the social partners that are considered relevant for young children's development—from parents to other caregivers, siblings, and peers. Yet most studies as well as interventions in early childhood still focus exclusively on parents, who are presumed to be the most significant socializing agents. Objecting to such a hierarchical understanding of the social world of children, I propose a complementarity view. Rather than being linearly ranked in a hierarchy of significance, children's social partners may complement each other by providing different but equally significant experiences. My suggestions are based on an ethnographic study in a rural community in Madagascar. Focusing on children in the first 3 years of life, I explore the full range of their social partners and the respective experiences they provide. Caregivers focus on children's physical needs and aim to keep them in a calm emotional state, while other young related children are the most crucial partners when it comes to play, face-to-face interaction, and the exchange of intense emotions. These complementary roles, I argue, lead to the parallel formation of two distinct socioemotional modes: a hierarchical one and an egalitarian one.

Parents are usually considered the most influential figures in young children's lives and development—in research as well as in early childhood policies and interventions. Global endeavors to improve early childhood development, for instance, which have become a booming sector of international development in the past three decades, are mostly directed at parents or caregivers. UNICEF's program Care for Child Development, to take one prominent example, claims on its website that “over 200 million children . . . do not reach their full human potential.” As a solution, the program aims to train parents and caregivers “to focus on the most important activities for the development of young children—play and communication.”<sup>1</sup> These claims are derived from a series of three articles in the *Lancet* that identify “inadequate cognitive stimulation” as a major risk for children under 5 years of age in so-called developing countries (Walker et al. 2007:153). As evidence, the authors state that only a minority of parents in these countries “provide cognitively stimulating materials to their child” or “actively involve their children in cognitively stimulating activities” (153). The corresponding interventions they refer to were all directed at mothers or parents and consisted mainly in training them how to play or talk with their children (151).<sup>2</sup>

This is but an example of a widespread parent-centric approach to early childhood research and intervention. It is based

on the premise that parents are the most influential people in virtually all domains of young children's development. Although seemingly trivial, this premise is far reaching. In the case above, the diagnosis that millions of young children do not receive adequate cognitive stimulation is directly derived from what parents do. This premise is misleading, I claim, especially when applied to those settings that are most frequently targeted by global parenting interventions (Morelli et al. 2018b) and least frequently studied in behavioral sciences (Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan 2010): rural communities in low- to middle-income countries. Here, and potentially everywhere, children might experience some modes of social interaction that are considered crucial for their learning and development, mainly with social partners other than their parents or caregivers. I ground my contention on cross-cultural research and substantiate it through a case study on the social world of infants and toddlers in a rural community of pastoralists in Madagascar.

In order to highlight the implications of my study and the corresponding literature for the broader field of early childhood research and intervention, I propose the concept of complementarity in the social world of children. Contrary to the conventional understanding that children's social partners are ranked in a hierarchy of relevance—from parents to other caregivers to siblings and peers—complementarity highlights the fact that children's social partners might be equally relevant, albeit with regard to different developmental domains and needs of the child. For instance, one partner may be most relevant for meeting the child's bodily needs, another for play or emotional intimacy. How and to what degree the diverse functions of child development are distributed among children's

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1. [https://www.unicef.org/earlychildhood/index\\_83036.html](https://www.unicef.org/earlychildhood/index_83036.html) (accessed March 31, 2020).

2. For critical perspectives on early child development interventions see Ejuu (2015), Morelli et al. (2018a, 2018b), Ng'asike (2014), Oppong (2015), Scheidecker et al. (2023), and Serpell (2019).

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social partners may differ greatly across cultural and social settings. Thus, I propose complementarity as an important dimension of cross-cultural variation that needs to be considered to avoid serious ethnocentric fallacies.<sup>3</sup> The concept builds on and combines diverse strands of cross-cultural research, which I will review next, before presenting the ethnographic study.

### From Mothers to Parents to Other Caregivers

Anthropology has played a crucial role in expanding the scope of social partners that are considered in studies on socialization and child development across the involved disciplines. An important milestone within this process was Thomas Weisner and Ronald Gallimore's (1977) article "My Brother's Keeper." By presenting ethnographic research demonstrating widespread use of nonparental caregivers around the world, they substantially challenged the almost exclusive focus on parents in mainstream research on early childhood development up to the 1970s. They also inspired a wealth of ethnographic and cross-cultural research on diverse multiple caregiving arrangements (e.g., Hewlett 1992; Keller and Chaudhary 2017; Seymour 2004; Tronick, Morelli, and Winn 1987). Influenced by these cross-cultural findings as well as the expansion of day care in Western industrialized countries, developmental psychologists have given greater attention to nonparental caregivers (for a review, see Lamb 1998). Multiple caretaking is now even sometimes considered within the framework of classical attachment theory, a leading paradigm for early relationship formation (Howes and Spieker 2016).

Despite increasing attention to multiple caregiving, much of the research on early childhood development still looks exclusively at parents as socializing agents—not only in mainstream psychology but also in cross-cultural research. It may seem justifiable, for the sake of efficiency and convenience, to focus on the parents as seemingly the most significant social partners of young children. After all, no cross-cultural study has claimed that anybody other than the parents is the most important caregiver of the youngest children in a given society, at least not under normal circumstances. Furthermore, attachment theory continues to legitimate an exclusive focus on parents (Keller 2013). According to monotropy, a major tenet of this theory, children form a primary attachment to a principal caregiver, which is usually the mother. This does not preclude the formation of additional attachments, which are believed to be hierarchically ranked according to their significance to the child (Cassidy 2016). As others have noted, research on early childhood more generally is largely guided by a hierarchical model of children's social partners (Tronick, Morelli, and Winn 1987). Such a hierarchical model implies that there is a principal caregiver, who has the greatest influence on the child and thus is the most important social partner to study.

However, the exclusive focus on the supposed principal caregivers becomes problematic when children's social partners are actually not linearly ranked in a hierarchy of relevance but assume complementary roles toward the child. In anthropology, such a complementary division of roles among caregivers has already been described for several communities in East and Central Africa, for example, by Herbert and Gloria Leiderman (1974): "We may find that although the mother remains the primary agent for meeting the physical needs of the infant, another meets his social needs" (83). Robert LeVine and colleagues (1994) found that among the Gusii in Kenya, "the child caregivers engage babies in social interaction more frequently than mothers do, indicating a possible complementarity in which the mother provides physical care and the child nurse social stimulation" (40).<sup>4</sup> In these examples, the mother is the most significant person only in regard to physical care, while another social partner is more relevant with regard to social stimulation. Even the tasks of physical care may be divided in a complementary fashion among caregivers. Elinor Ochs (1988:81–85) observed that in a Samoan village the older caregivers, as, for instance, mothers, tended to delegate the tasks requiring a high level of activity and involvement to younger caregivers. Hence, in these and probably many other communities it would be misleading to assess children's experience of social stimulation or involved caregiving solely through their interaction with their mothers.

Despite their critical potential, these propositions of complementary role division have had little influence on the general study of early childhood development. In part, this may be explained by a certain self-restriction in much of the debate about children's social partners: it appears to be confined from the outset to caretaking and caregivers. This is clear from the varying notions used in this area, such as polymatric caretaking (Leiderman and Leiderman 1974), child and sibling caretaking (Weisner and Gallimore 1977), multiple caretaking (Tronick, Morelli, and Winn 1987), nonparental childcare (Lamb 1998), and simply childcare (LeVine et al. 1994). In a sense, the extension from mother to parents to other caregivers remained parent centric, which is most evident in the use of terms such as "polymatric caretaking," "allomothering," and "parenting."

Thus, among the whole range of children's social partners, only those who assume the particular role of caretaking toward the child were considered significant for the purposes of research. Even if the category of caregiving is understood in the broadest possible way, it still implies prioritizing consideration of those social partners who come relatively close to its core meaning, for example, to focus on social partners who are older than the focal child, rather than on similarly aged or younger social partners. As a consequence, those social partners who do not fit well into the category of caregivers but might be important to the child in other ways were unlikely to be considered

3. The concept I am proposing here is not to be confused with religious doctrines of complementary gender roles, which, contrary to my goal here, serve to essentialize particular role divisions.

4. While these authors emphasized the role division between mothers and child caregivers, others, most notably Barry Hewlett (1992), examined in detail the differential roles of fathers and mothers.

as socialization agents. Furthermore, within the caregiver paradigm, the relationship between multiple social partners has mostly been conceptualized as one of alternation rather than of potentially simultaneous supplementation. Taken together, caregiving is not an optimal starting point for exploring the full scope of complementary role division among the whole range of children's socialization agents or for effectively undermining the universal validity of the hierarchical model of children's social partners.<sup>5</sup>

### Beyond Caregivers

Research on early childhood has increasingly looked beyond caregivers, often combined with a shift in perspective—from attachment relationships to children's groups, from socio-emotional development to the acquisition of skills, from other-directed socialization to self-initiated learning and agency, and from infants to older children. In his pioneering work, William Corsaro (1985) has pointed to the partly autonomous dynamics of young children's peer cultures. His own and most other research on peers in early childhood pertains to Western contexts and here especially to childcare centers (Corsaro 2009). In cross-cultural research, peers came into view mainly through the study of certain domains of interaction and learning, particularly play (e.g., Gaskins, Haight, and Lancy 2007; Pellegrini 2009; Takada 2020), social learning or cultural transmission (e.g., Boyette 2016; Hewlett et al. 2011; Lancy 1996; Lew-Levy et al. 2019; Maynard and Tovote 2010), and language (e.g., de León 2007; Goodwin and Kyratzis 2012).

This research has produced several findings that are highly relevant for the concept of complementarity suggested here. In many non-Western rural settings, children spend large amounts of time without direct adult supervision in the company of other children, who are often related and of mixed age (e.g., Gaskins 2006; Konner 1976*b*; Martini 1994; Nsamenang 2011; Rogoff 1981; Rogoff, Morelli, and Chavajay 2010). Under these conditions, children's influence on one another might be even stronger and more independent of adult guidance than it is among peers in day care settings, who, after all, interact in a context heavily structured and controlled by caregivers. Furthermore, this research demonstrates that for a number of developmental domains, children may rely to a large degree or even entirely on other children. Most notably, children in many communities play exclusively with other children, as mothers and other caregivers lack the time or motivation to play with them (e.g., Martini 1994; Rogoff 1981; for a review, see Lancy 2007). Even an activity such as teaching, which seems to imply a

hierarchical relationship, has been shown in one community to occur mainly in child-to-child relationships (Lew-Levy et al. 2019), whereas adults were found to be more important teachers in other communities (Boyette and Hewlett 2017). Finally, one study demonstrated that the proportion of children's conflicts with adults versus with other children differs clearly across two neighboring communities of foragers and farmers (Fouts and Lamb 2009:400–401), pointing to varying patterns of complementarity in yet another domain.

Taken together, this body of research challenges the primacy of caregivers in toddlerhood or middle childhood regarding particular domains of interaction and learning. It demonstrates that children may assume leading roles as socializing agents in these domains and thus complement caregivers in crucial, not just supplementary, ways. However, it does not help establish complementarity on a more fundamental level, since it leaves one aspect of the hierarchical model of children's social partners unchallenged: its sequential dimension. As Dale Hay and colleagues (2009) point out, “most major developmental theories hold that . . . the ability to engage in peer relationships develops later in childhood and derives from earlier relationships with caregivers” (125). According to attachment theory, for instance, the child first needs to develop an attachment bond to a primary caregiver who can function as a secure base. This allows the child to explore and, by doing so, to socialize with other children. Thus, even if toddlers play mostly with similar-aged children, parents may still be considered the primary social partners in the sense that they initially established or enabled peer relations. Most cross-cultural studies on child-to-child interaction fail to effectively scrutinize this assumption, as they tend to focus on those dimensions that are associated with peer relations in Western contexts—play, talk, and other modes of social interaction in toddlerhood or middle childhood.

The view of peers as secondary social partners may be biased, however, as the dominant theories on the emergence of peer relationships are based on research in Western middle-class contexts (Corsaro 2009), where children are typically born into nuclear families and only subsequently experience considerable peer contact, for example, through playdates, playground visits, or day care institutions (Howes 2009). This contrasts with the social world of infants in some other settings as described, for example, by Edward Tronick and colleagues: “Efe infants' and toddlers' experience of a diverse array of social contact with many individuals begins during the newborn period” (Tronick, Morelli, and Ivey 1992:573). To be sure, even among the Efe and in other non-Western communities, children initially spend most, but rapidly decreasing amounts, of their time with adults, while contact with other children increases over the first years of life (e.g., Rogoff 1981; for the ethnographic record, see Barry and Paxson 1971). Yet this pattern of ontogenetic change does not necessarily mean that children's caregivers are somehow replaced by other children in the course of the first years. These changes may as well result from decreasing needs for the kind of care caregivers have to offer and increasing needs for the kind of social experiences other children provide.

5. In response to the anthropological and cultural-psychological critique based on the notion of multiple caregiving, proponents of classical attachment theory have argued that the existence of several caregivers is compatible with monotropy and an “attachment hierarchy” (Cassidy 2016:15). In fact, multiple caregiving does not preclude one caregiver being more significant to the child than all the others. Complementary role division, by contrast, undermines this argument.

The concept of complementarity proposed here pertains not only to role division among social partners at a particular age but also to the ontogenetic dimension of relationship formation. It implies considering that children's relationships to different social partners may emerge in a parallel fashion, not necessarily in a causal sequence. Hay and colleagues (2009) present research indicating that parallel relationship formation is actually the case for peers and adults in Western settings. Closely related is the assumption of context-specific learning. Judith Harris (1995, 2000) argued that children (in Western societies) acquire at least two "patterns of behavior, cognitions, and emotions" (1995:462), one specific to the family and another to the public sphere. I assume that context-specific learning also applies to children's complementary relationships. Thus, complementarity may go along with the acquisition of relationship-specific ways of behaving, thinking, and feeling.

### Researching Complementarity in the Social World of Children

Cross-cultural research from a socialization perspective has greatly expanded the range of potentially significant social partners but has for the most part remained confined to caregivers and caregiving. Cross-cultural research on particular domains of learning, on the other hand, has demonstrated the significance of child-to-child interaction but has focused mostly on those aspects that are conventionally associated with peers. The concept of complementarity I am proposing here suggests combining the two approaches and looking across categories of social partners as well as across domains of activity or development. It may serve several purposes: to encourage research on cross-cultural variation in the pattern and degree of complementarity, to sensitize cross-cultural research on particular developmental domains for the importance of carefully selecting children's social contexts, and to alert policy makers and practitioners in the applied field of global early childhood development to the problems of assessing children's developmental risks solely on the basis of what caregivers do.

In order to provide a detailed empirical example of complementarity, I explore its particular manifestation and implications in a community of pastoralists in Madagascar. In using this case study, I do not wish to suggest that the specific patterns I am going to describe can be generalized to other social and cultural contexts. Nonetheless the case study implies that in other settings the existence of some form of complementary division of roles should be expected and needs to be carefully considered if blind spots resulting from a priori role ascriptions to children's social partners are to be avoided and children's social experiences captured adequately.

In the first part of the study, I explore the full range of infants' and toddlers' social partners based on observed contact. Second, I focus on a number of diverse modes of interaction and explore how they are distributed across the whole array of social partners. Taken together, these two substudies will provide the contours of complementary role division in the community

under study. In order to explore the ontogenetic dimension of complementarity, I then reconstruct in greater detail the formation of two patterns of relationship that complement each other most clearly in the community: hierarchical and egalitarian.

### The People of Menamaty

Menamaty is a rural commune of a dozen villages in southern Madagascar where I conducted 15 months of ethnographic research on childhood between 2009 and 2015 (Scheidecker 2017).<sup>6</sup> With few exceptions, the villagers self-identified as Bara pastoralists and maintained a subsistence lifestyle, depending primarily on animal husbandry and cultivation of rice and other crops. The villages were not connected to the road system of Madagascar or to the electricity grid or phone network. Colonial and more recent efforts to Christianize the population and establish schooling in the region proved untenable. Aside from a few migrants from other regions of Madagascar, the villagers did not consider themselves Christian. Instead, their religious practices and beliefs were centered on ancestral spirits. Education in Menamaty was informal during the period of data acquisition. Only at the end of the research period was a basic primary school with one teacher established in the village where I lived during my research. The village population spoke exclusively Malagasy, a Malayo-Polynesian language that is used all over Madagascar.

The village where I did most of my research, which I will call Ranomadio, consisted of about 350 people living in roughly 60 houses that were situated in close proximity to each other without any fences or courtyards separating them. Children could safely roam throughout the village and its vicinity, since there was no automobile traffic, dangerous animals, or other sources of danger. Children were not strictly associated with any single household: while usually eating with their parents, they often slept together in one of the vacant houses. While households were somewhat fluid, the village population was clearly divided into several patrilineages (*tarikys*). Ranomadio consisted of seven *tarikys*, varying in size from a dozen to more than 100 members. Most *tarikys* in the villages were connected through kinship ties resulting from intermarriage. As a consequence, all children were related in one way or another to the majority of the people in the village. This social structure was typical of most of the neighboring villages as well.

In order to contextualize the social world of children, we will now have a closer look at the modes of relationship and associated ways of interacting. Through my participation in the social life of the villages, I initially had the impression that people in Menamaty were completely embedded in hierarchical relationships and had a pronounced sociocentric (Shweder and

6. Institutionally, my fieldwork was embedded in the research project "Socialization and Ontogeny of Emotions in Cross-Cultural Comparison" at the Freie Universität Berlin, funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG). The project had an interdisciplinary orientation, combining approaches from sociocultural anthropology and developmental psychology.

Bourne 1984) or interdependent (Markus and Kitayama 1991) orientation. My impressions were in line with the major ethnographies about the Bara. Jacques Faublée (1954) observed that “there are no individuals in the strict sense of the word, just persons in so far as they are part of their group” (82).<sup>7</sup> Richard Huntington (1988) noted: “When the Bara voice their approval of a person, the highest praise is that the person is ‘no trouble’ (*tsy magnay*)” (55). However, in the course of my fieldwork I started to question this view, as I increasingly observed people behaving in a loud, emotionally expressive, and self-assertive manner. These observations corresponded more to the descriptions in an ethnography by Louis Michel (1957), according to which the Bara are “belligerent pastoralists with a proud and independent temperament” (35).<sup>8</sup>

It took me some time to realize that these self-expressive behaviors were not just exceptions from the hierarchical-interdependent norm but were embedded in a second, equally relevant, egalitarian socioemotional mode. While most cross-cultural studies characterize children’s relationships as either hierarchical or egalitarian, such a coexistence of contrasting sociorelational modes has already been described for another—distantly related—society: “Polynesian children learn two sets of rules for interacting with others. One applies to hierarchical relationships . . . and the other applies to interactions among age-mates and status-equals” (Martini 1994:77).

In Menamaty, the hierarchical mode was most pronounced in intergenerational relationships within the patrilineage but, by extension, also characterized all other relationships between young and old. Younger individuals were expected to acknowledge their lower status and show respect to their elders by behaving in a calm, modest, and emotionally restrained way, keeping a certain physical distance, and performing particular gestures of respect. In addition, throughout their lives, individuals were supposed to obey elders from the same patrilineage, especially parents, grandparents, and ancestral spirits. My interview partners conceptualized—and legitimized—intergenerational relationships as an exchange of life for obedience. According to them, the life of the younger generation depended on a constant influx of life force from the parents and ancestors. In exchange, the offspring were supposed to submit to the will of their procreators. Disobedient or disrespectful behavior would enrage elders, including ancestral spirits, leading to a life-threatening lack of vitality and diseases that could be averted only by offerings of alcohol or cows. This scenario was closely related to a kind of moral fear (*tahotsy*) that parents aimed to instill in children through threats or acts of physical punishment (Scheidecker 2017).

In the beginning, I mistook this hierarchical mode as the norm because most of my initial social encounters took place in hierarchical constellations, for example, when I was received as a guest, during ceremonial events, or because of the age gap between myself and the children I observed. I began to

realize that there was another, egalitarian mode only after I socialized more with my peers and, in particular, after the children had overcome their inhibitions in my presence. Egalitarian contexts occurred whenever people were in the company of others from the same age group, since in these cases the age-dependent hierarchy no longer applied. People would spend most of their working and relaxation time with relatives of a similar age (*nama*). In contrast to highly formalized, hierarchical relations, the egalitarian relationships between *nama* were built on individual preferences, reciprocal support, emotional intimacy, and mutual affection demonstrated, for example, by publicly holding hands. *Nama* relationships resembled friendships in many regards but had additional dimensions in that they were based on kinship, permanent cohabitation, and daily cooperation. Apart from *nama*, the people of Menamaty were also engaged in other egalitarian relations, most notably pre- or extramarital romantic relationships and hostile relationships with unrelated peers based on fierce competition and mutual retaliation. While not ignoring other dimensions such as gender or kinship, in this contribution I will foreground the dimensions of hierarchical and egalitarian relationships, as they were most clearly associated with distinct complementary interaction patterns.

## Methods

To explore the social world of children in Menamaty, I present data from spot observations, which I then interpret and extend on the basis of extensive interviews and long-term participant observation (for details, see Scheidecker 2017). In conjunction with the spot observations, I interviewed 42 mothers and 29 child minders between 6 and 18 years of age about infancy and early childhood. The interview partners were chosen from these two categories because the villagers unanimously identified them as main caregivers. One year of prior ethnographic fieldwork included continuous participant observation and interviews with a wide range of individuals, including 98 children, about their daily activities and relationships.

Spot observation is a well-established time sampling method in anthropology, especially in research on young children (e.g., Hewlett 1992; LeVine et al. 1994). Its systematic procedure allowed me to recognize patterns in the quickly changing contacts of young children with a large number of social partners. These patterns had largely escaped my attention during my earlier participant observation, when I unwittingly limited my attention to particular caregivers.

The spot observation sample consisted of 45 children, aged 3 months to 3 years, living in Ranomadio and a neighboring village of about 500 inhabitants. Data collection and initial interpretations were supported by two field assistants, one of whom grew up in the neighboring village. After the families gave their consent and participated in the interviews, we observed the children according to a predetermined schedule. The plan stipulated that each child was to be observed twice a day over a period of two weeks. Furthermore, the spot observations were

7. Original in French, my translation.

8. Original in French, my translation.

Table 1. Characteristics of observed children

|                          | Age (months)              |                      |              |        |                 | Total |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|--------------|--------|-----------------|-------|
|                          | 3–6                       | 6–12                 | 12–16        | 24–32  | 34–41           |       |
| Developmental milestones | Able to sit on the ground | Able to crawl, stand | Able to walk | Weaned | Younger sibling |       |
| No. children             | 10                        | 10                   | 10           | 8      | 7               | 45    |
| Gender:                  |                           |                      |              |        |                 |       |
| Female                   | 7                         | 4                    | 5            | 3      | 2               | 21    |
| Male                     | 3                         | 6                    | 5            | 5      | 5               | 24    |
| No. observations         | 131                       | 153                  | 179          | 142    | 122             | 727   |

distributed across all hours of daylight (from 6 a.m. to 5 p.m.). If a child could not be found for an observation on a given day, that observation would be made the next day at the same time. Not all planned observations could be realized because some children left the village for a time during the observation period. Ultimately, each child was observed between 15 and 22 times, resulting in a total of 830 observations.

As it turned out to be too difficult to manually record the large number of people who were usually in the vicinity of the focal child as well as all ongoing interactions, at the suggestion of my field assistants and with the consent of all participants, we video recorded the observations. This video documentation made it possible to view the recordings every evening with the field assistants and participants to identify all of the children's social partners and discuss the documented interactions.

After my fieldwork, a student assistant and I coded the recorded spot observations using the software INTERACT. The coding system was based on categories developed by Heidi Keller (2007), which we inductively extended. For the analysis of children's social partners, we excluded observations when the focal child was sleeping, resulting in a total of 727 valid spot observations. We determined social partners according to their distance from the child at the beginning of each observation, using three categories: "body contact," "in arm's reach," and "in view." Each social partner was then identified by name, age, gender, and kinship. Furthermore, we coded a wide range of behaviors or interactions that occurred in the first 10 seconds of the spot observation, including object play, face-to-face contact, and smiling. We carried out our data analysis using SPSS. After aggregating the data for each child, we grouped the children according to their age and locally relevant developmental milestones (see table 1).

### Children's Social Partners in the First 3 Years of Life

The infants and toddlers of Menamaty were almost constantly surrounded by people, frequently engaging with two or more individuals at a time. Figure 1 presents the full array of social partners during the spot observations. For the sake of clarity, I focus here on social partners maximally at arm's reach from the focal child. This distance is close enough to indicate some social interaction yet far enough to capture the simultaneity of children's social engagements. Children's partners are grouped according to the categories "mother," "father," "nonparental

adults," "children 10–17 years," and "children 0–9 years." Apart from the first two, these categories refer to groups of social partners. Thus, they are not particularly revealing regarding the prominence of individual social partners. Nevertheless, they allow us to explore how the social world of children is structured according to complementary roles, some of which are rather individualized while others are typically shared by a number of individuals.

a) Mothers clearly stood out among all social partners—at least in the first year of the child's life. The youngest focal children (3–6 months) were in close proximity to their mothers for more than 60% of the observations. This dominant role of mothers, however, was rather short lived. The 2- and 3-year-old children spent only 10% of the time with their mothers; at 80% of the observations the mothers were not even in sight. Mothers unanimously cited their exclusive capacity to breastfeed their own children to explain their prominent role at this early stage. Accordingly, they considered weaning, usually at the end of the second year, as an endpoint of their special role in the child's life. If the parents were divorced, mothers usually returned to their native village and left the child with the father or, if the father was deceased, with his relatives. As a consequence, 22% of children aged 5–8 years and 38% of 9- to 13-year-olds lived without their mothers in the village of Ranomadio.

b) Fathers spent much less time with young children than mothers. They were within arm's reach of the child at only about 3%–8% of the observations, without any significant changes throughout the children's first 3 years. However, fathers gained in relative importance as the presence of mothers in the child's immediate environment sharply decreased. In the interviews, fathers were not portrayed as regular caregivers of children but rather as providers and authority figures whose importance increases with the child's age.

c) Nonparental adults provided considerably less close contact to infants than mothers. According to the data I gathered during participant observation, they rarely served as regular caregivers for infants and toddlers because their availability was limited. Grandparents, who are described as important supplementary caregivers in many societies (e.g., Knodel and Nguyen 2015), had already passed away in most cases. Adults from the parents' generation usually had children of their own, which is why they would take care of a relative's child only occasionally. Aunts, who clearly stand out among nonparental adults, usually jumped in as caregivers while sharing work or

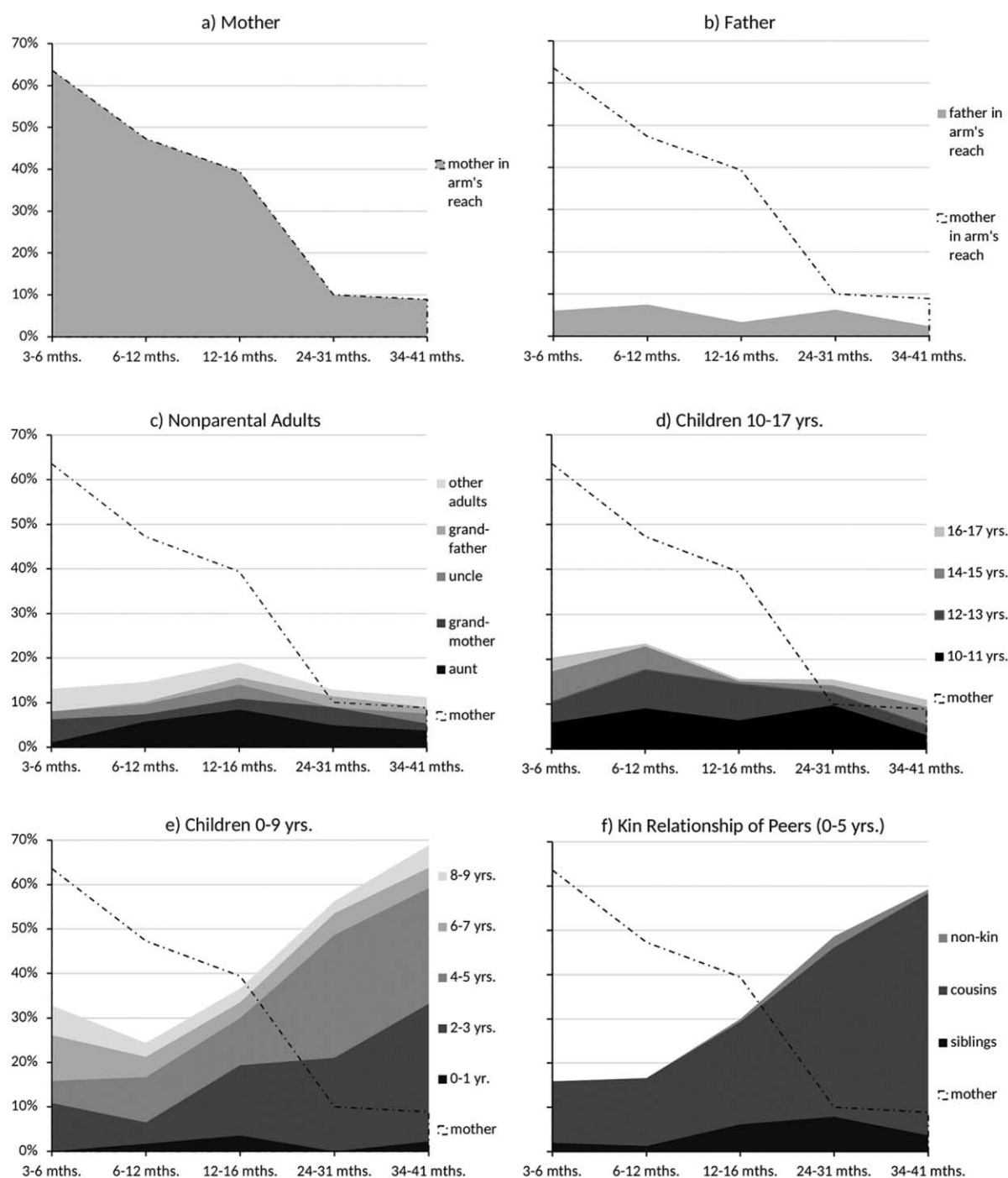


Figure 1. Graphs depict the full array of social partners observed within arm's reach of the focal children. In each graph, the y-axis represents the percentage of observations during which the social partners were present. It approximates the proportion of time the focal children spent with those partners. The x-axis represents the age of the focal children and indicates ontogenetic changes during the first 3 years of life.

leisure with the mother. It should be noted, however, that nonparental adults may gain in relative importance as children become older. Children 2 and 3 years of age spent more time with nonparental adults than with their mothers, although mothers remained the single most prominent caregiver of toddlers. For older children it was not uncommon for a paternal aunt or

grandmother to become the principal caregiver, especially if the mother had left the village.

*d)* Children aged 10–17 years were more frequently present in the immediate environment of infants than nonparental adults or the father but less than the mother. Among these social partners, preadolescent children aged 10–13 years clearly



dominated. According to my interviews and participant observation, they were usually in charge as child minders (*mpitan-zaza*, lit., “child holder”). Their task was to take care of the child for short periods of time in order to allow the mother to do her work more efficiently or to recreate. All focal children up to the age of around 15 months had one or two regular *mpitan-zaza*. Their ages ranged from 6 to 18 years, although the vast majority of them (90%) were between 10 and 14 years old. Mothers gave two reasons for preferring preadolescent child minders: they were more skilled caregivers than younger children and more reliable than older ones, who may be unavailable as a result of their dating activities.<sup>9</sup> All child minders were related to the child, mostly as siblings or cousins. Eighty percent of them were girls. Boys were appointed as child minders only if no girls were available. The preference for female child minders corresponded to the gendered division of labor more generally and was also regarded as a way to train girls for their future role as mothers.

e) Children aged 0–9 years turned out to be extraordinary. In contrast to all other social partners, their presence increased dramatically across the children’s first 3 years of life. Infants aged 3–6 months already spent more time with other young children than with any other category of social partners except for mothers: 1-year-olds spent roughly as much time with them as with mothers; 2-year-olds spent more than 50% and 3-year-olds almost 70% of their time with other young children. Within the group of young social partners, the age distribution is clearly unequal: most of them were 0 to 5 years of age, while 6- to 9-year-olds were only marginally represented. This finding corresponds to the results from my interviews with 98 children about their closest friends/companions (*nama*). Throughout childhood, they were of similar age, maximally 3 years older and 2 years younger. The prevalence of similar-aged social partners may be explained by children’s preferences. As mothers frequently put it, similar-aged children are simply more attracted to each other as companions and play partners. Children older than 5 showed little interest in toddlers as play partners, preferring instead to spend most of the day with their own peers outside the village. Furthermore, unlike preadolescents, they were rarely in charge as child minders.

f) To further specify children’s youngest social partners (0–5 years), the last graph differentiates them according to kinship. Only a tiny fraction were unrelated. Some were full or half siblings, but the overwhelming majority were cousins of varying degrees. This distribution may be due in part to the fact that, within both villages, cousins of different degrees simply outnumbered siblings and unrelated children. However, according to the interviews mentioned above, children of all ages clearly preferred cousins as friends and companions over sib-

lings. All the close relationships I learned about during participant observation were between cousins. Sibling relationships were frequently burdened by jealousies, and relationships with unrelated children tended to be distant if not hostile.

Taken together, the data demonstrate that infants and toddlers in Menamaty had regular contact with a wide range of social partners, not only parents and other related adults but also, to a large degree, related children. As indicated above, some cross-cultural studies have already demonstrated the importance of related mixed-age child partners in diverse rural communities (e.g., Rogoff, Morelli, and Chavajay 2010). My findings indicate that, at least in Menamaty, the child partners can be differentiated into three groups: preadolescent child-minders (*mpitan-zaza*), relatively uninvolved middle-age children, and similar-aged children, mostly cousins, who clearly stood out as companions (*nama*). In mainstream early childhood research and interventions, related similar-aged children have rarely been investigated as crucial social partners—perhaps because they do not fall neatly into the commonly accepted categories of caregivers, siblings, or (unrelated) peers. In order to capture complementary role divisions, we need to supplement the data with an analysis of children’s social interactions.

### The Distribution of Social Interaction across Children’s Partners

My analysis of children’s social interactions was initially guided by the theoretical distinction between pediatric and pedagogic cultural models of parenting (LeVine et al. 1994) and by the similar differentiation between proximal and distal parenting styles (Keller 2007). Pediatric or proximal parenting focuses on the child’s physical needs through practices of primary care (e.g., feeding), body contact, and bodily stimulation. Proximal parenting fosters hierarchical relatedness, a relational mode in which the individuals form part of a hierarchically structured group. The pedagogical or distal mode of parenting focuses on stimulating interactions such as face-to-face contact, object play, the exchange of positive emotions, and verbal communication. It promotes “psychological autonomy,” which Keller describes as the prioritization of individuals’ emotional concerns and egalitarian social relations. LeVine and colleagues and Keller both demonstrate that parenting in Western urban middle classes leans toward the pedagogical or distal mode, whereas parenting in the non-Western rural farming communities they studied conforms to a pediatric or proximal mode.

In this section, I look at interactions that characterize the two modes: bodily contact as an exemplary proximal parenting practice and face-to-face contact, object play, and exchanges of smiling/laughing as exemplary distal interactions. However, while these authors focus exclusively on parents or caregivers, I extend the analysis to take into account all social partners who were found to be engaged with the focal children. Figure 2 depicts how children’s experiences of these interactions are distributed across their social partners.

9. Nsamenang (2011:63) suggests almost the same age range for child tenders in traditional Cameroonian contexts (11–15 years). Studies on other societies have reported much younger child caregivers (for a review, see Weisner and Gallimore 1977). One reason for this deviation might be the presence of schooling, which limits the availability of older children as caregivers.

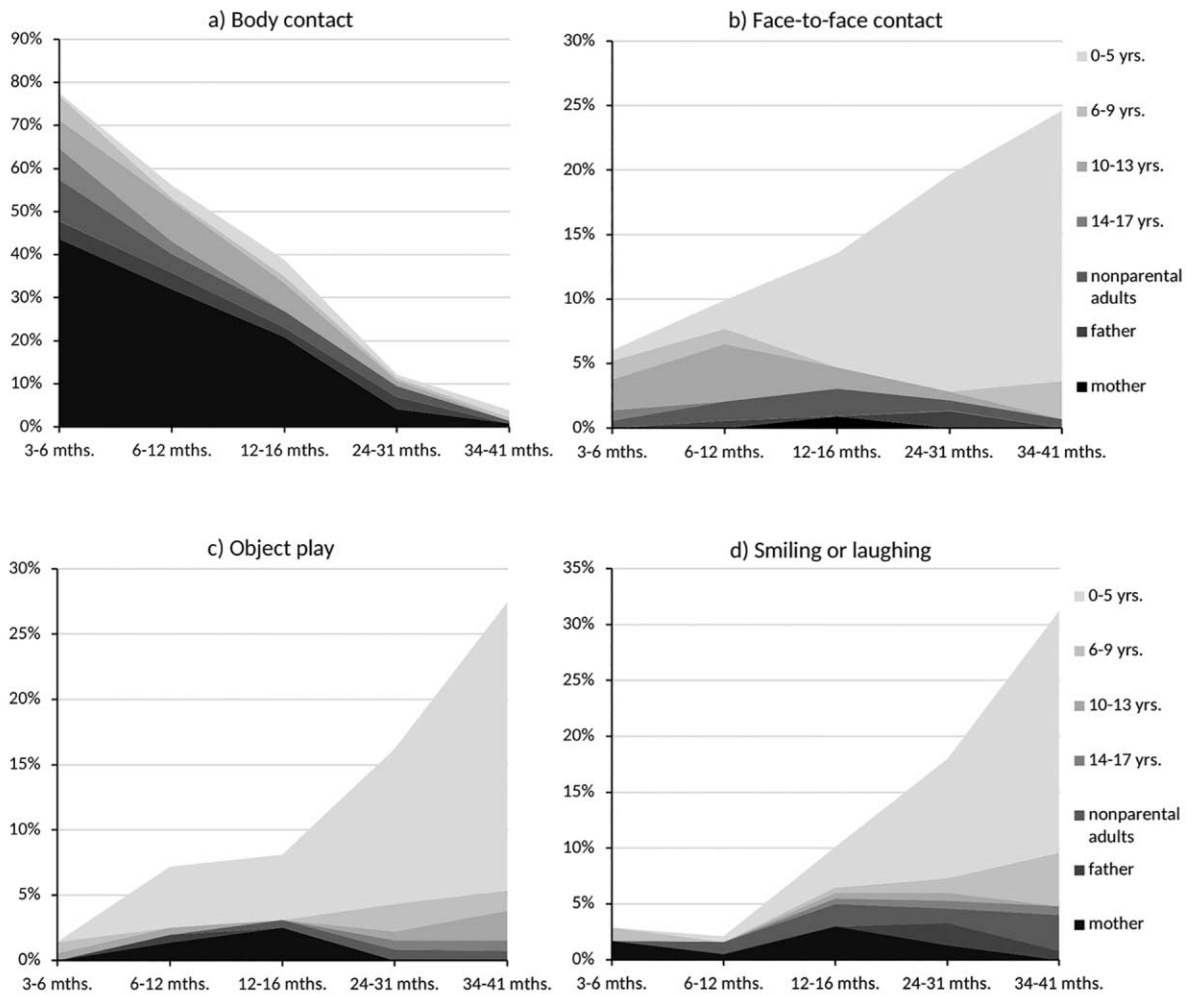


Figure 2. Graphs depict children's social partners in four modes of interaction. In each graph, the y-axis represents the percentage of observations during which children were engaged in one mode of interaction with various social partners. The x-axis represents the age of the focal children and indicates ontogenetic changes across the first 3 years of life.

When comparing the graph of body contact with those of the other three interaction modes, a complementary distribution across social partners becomes immediately apparent. The focal children experienced the most bodily contact with their mother, with preadolescent child minders and, to a lesser degree, with fathers and other related adults. They had very little bodily contact with other young children. By contrast, children experienced face-to-face interactions, object play, and positive emotions mostly with other young children and rarely with adults. The mothers figured even less than other adults as social partners in these distal forms of interaction. Face-to-face interaction, which was coded on the basis of eye contact, occurred only once between mother and child during spot observations. Object play, which was coded on shared attention to an object, occurred somewhat more frequently in the mother-child relationship. However, none of these instances resulted in joint play. Rather, mother-child play consisted of the mother drawing the child's attention to an object in order to encourage him or her to play alone or with other children. While children sometimes

smiled or laughed in the presence of mothers, the mothers never actively solicited these emotions from children. Taken together, the data point to a highly pronounced complementary distribution of proximal and distal interaction modes between caregivers and young child partners.

On the basis of my participant observation and interviews, I conclude that there are two major reasons for this complementary role division. First, parents and other caregivers found it unnecessary to engage with children in distal interactions. In the interviews, all parents and other caregivers stressed that their major concern was to ensure the children's physical health and bodily development. It was only on my insistence that they would also address the issue of the child's cognitive development, with reference, for instance, to the common saying *Ngy ray aman-dreny tsy niteraky fagnahy fa nitera-bata*: "Parents do not engender the mind but the body [of the child]." In their view, children's minds develop well enough without their help, as children play and explore the world around them with other children, who are constantly around and naturally interested in

play. In short, caregivers did not consider play and cognitive stimulation to be their domain of responsibility. Second, to play, and to engage in other symmetrical ways with children, was considered inappropriate for adults, as I quickly learned from my own attempts. Interacting with children in these ways was viewed as being childish, compromising one's dignity, and even morally transgressing the age-dependent social hierarchy that demanded asymmetrical ways of interacting.

These data indicate that some of the contrasts that have been used to capture cross-cultural differences can be present within one and the same cultural context, albeit embedded in different social relations. Caregivers in Menamaty conformed perfectly to the concepts of pediatric or proximal parenting by attending mainly to children's physical needs and dependency. However, a look beyond the caregivers revealed that similar-aged children, mainly cousins, provided ample opportunities for joint object play, face-to-face interaction, and experiencing and sharing intense positive emotions. These interaction patterns resemble what has been described as distal style and likely foster a more autonomous orientation.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, my data indicate that it would be misleading to study these children's distal interactions on the basis of caregiver-child relations, since caregivers were of little relevance in that regard. A number of anthropologists have suggested that the infrequency of social stimulation in mother-child relations may be compensated by other caregivers (Lancy 2007; Leiderman and Leiderman 1974; LeVine et al. 1994). However, the possibility that those similar-aged social partners who are not in charge as caregivers may provide most of these stimulating experiences to infants and toddlers has rarely been explored.

In addition to the complementary role distribution among children's social partners, the data presented thus far also point to complementary patterns of relationship formation. This would contradict the conventional hierarchical-sequential understanding of relationship formation, according to which relationships and ways of interacting are first established with primary caregivers and then extended to other social partners such as peers. Taken alone, the data from the previous section (fig. 1) appear to support such a sequential model, as the social world of children in Menamaty is first dominated by mothers and later by similar-aged children. However, in combination with data from the current section (fig. 2), it becomes clear that these ontogenetic changes in the social world of children correlate with changes in children's time demands for the kind of care and social stimulation their social partners offer. Children's time with the mother decreases as their need for the kind of physical care she provides declines. Children's time with other young children increases as they spend more time on the kind of social interactions these partners have to offer.

Thus, I suggest that in Menamaty, children's relationships to caregivers and similar-aged children develop not consecutively but in a complementary fashion, in conjunction with

two distinct modes of interacting and relating. In the remainder of this article, I will explore this assumption ethnographically.<sup>11</sup> First, I focus on the formation of children's relationships with mothers and other caregivers, which, I argue, leads to a hierarchical relational mode. Subsequently, I take a closer look at the formation of relationships with other children, which leads to an egalitarian relational mode. I reconstruct the two relational modes along three dimensions: (a) caregiving styles/interaction patterns, (b) ontogenetic changes, and (c) particular relationships.

## The Formation of Hierarchical Relationships

### Caregiving Style

Mothers' as well as child minders' care for children was distinctly body centered, that is, focused on their physical needs. As indicated by the results of the spot observations (fig. 2), caregivers provided almost constant body contact, at least to infants, while almost never engaging in face-to-face contact, play, or emotionally stimulating interaction with children. Bodily contact provided the context for most other care practices, such as feeding, soothing, or putting to sleep, since devices such as cradles, buggies, and pacifiers were not used to substitute for body contact. In 71 extensive interviews about child-rearing, mothers and preadolescent child minders expressed the same ideas (for details, see Scheidecker 2017): their primary developmental goal was the children's rapid physical growth and the resistance to diseases that such growth implied. They also placed importance on fostering children's quick motor development, especially their sitting and walking abilities, as these were recognized as reducing children's demand for care. The most important proximal goal for caregivers, however, was to keep the child calm, which they characterized as the absence of negative emotions and described as having a "clear heart" (*mazava fo*) or a "disengaged heart" (*afa-po*). They associated such a calm state with reduced care demands and good health and with the behavioral goal of raising a respectful child. My interview partners unanimously described breastfeeding as a central care practice that was the most effective way to achieve all of these developmental goals. As one mother of four children stated: "From the moment of his birth I give him the breast. When he is a bit older, he gets some rice in addition. That's how he grows up. *Zagnahary* [the creator god] makes his mind grow. As a mother, I just give him the breast."

While mothers breastfed their children amply, usually several times an hour, they rarely focused visually on the child. Rather, their attention was devoted to other activities such as working or chatting with adult companions. Correspondingly, breastfeeding was not conceptualized as an emotionally intimate interaction but rather as the transfer of a powerful substance from the mother to the child. Similarly, caregivers described

10. For a comparable argument concerning Runa children in the Ecuadorian Amazon see Mezzenzana (2020:550).

11. For a more detailed account, see Scheidecker (2017).

bodily contact mainly in instrumental terms, as a way to support children's bodies and to keep them calm rather than as an expression of affection. Cuddling, hugging, kissing, holding hands, and other explicitly affectionate practices of body contact were not an established component of caregiver-child relations, but they did occur quite regularly in child-to-child relationships.

Taken together, the body-centered caregiving style in Menamamy emphasizes at least two dimensions of the emerging caregiver-child relationship: children experience their caregivers primarily as a source of bodily well-being and a calm emotional state, not as a source of intense positive (or negative) emotions or as stimulating interaction partners. Moreover, they likely also learn to perceive their caregivers as clearly unequal social partners. The hierarchical dimension may be generally inherent in relationships between caregiver and "care receiver." However, in contrast to Western middle-class parents, who tend to interact with children in a "quasi equal" way (Keller 2007:254), the caregivers in Menamamy strongly emphasized the hierarchical dimension of the child-caregiver relationship and avoided reciprocal interactions such as face-to-face contact.

#### *Ontogenetic Changes*

During the first 3 years of life, the children of Menamamy experienced a dramatic reduction in bodily contact, from nearly 80% in infancy to less than 5% for 3-year-olds. In fact, toddlers were expected to avoid all physical contact with parents and other adults and even to keep a respectful distance from them. Similar observations in many other rural communities have been interpreted as "parental rejection" (Ritchie and Ritchie 1979:57), "disindulgence" (Levy 1978:226), and "toddler rejection" (Lancy 2007:276). By contrast, I argue that the ontogenetic changes in Menamamy allow children to sustain their initial experience of caregivers as powerful sources of their physical well-being and sustenance. This is possible because the initial constant body-centered care is gradually channeled into a particular social transaction: the provision of food and—on a more abstract level—the transmission of "life force" (*ay*).<sup>12</sup>

The interlocutors with whom I discussed the issue found the suggestion that toddlers experience hurtful rejection to be implausible. Instead, they took it as a matter of fact that toddlers simply preferred the more exciting company of other children, while they continued to approach their caregivers for food. For them, the central dimension of hierarchical relationships—the intergenerational transmission of life force—continues throughout childhood and even throughout one's entire life. From this perspective, only the modes of transmission change across the life course: from constant body contact and breastfeeding in infancy to the provision of food in childhood to rituals of blessing and healing throughout adulthood. Accordingly, caregivers

did not emphasize the affective value of any particular mode of caregiving. As outlined above, they rather focused on the instrumentality of their practices, which may quickly become obsolete as children grow older. Regarding the dramatic decline of body contact, almost all mothers explained, rather matter-of-factly, that they would stop holding the child on their lap as soon as the child was able to sit, they would stop carrying the child on their hip once the child started walking, and they would stop carrying the child on their back when the child could walk longer distances. Since caregivers never established bodily contact as an emotionally expressive interaction, its subsequent cessation did not imply emotional rejection.

Based on my observations, I argue that children in Menamamy did indeed have ample opportunities to experience feeding, or life sustenance more generally, as the core of care and of their relationship to caregivers. Children usually experienced breastfeeding as the first, and often the only, form of maternal attention when they were distressed or upon reunion. Most children were breastfed in this way until the end of the second year (21.4 months on average). Ainsworth (1977:128) has described these same features as necessary for breastfeeding to become an important dimension of the mother-child bond. While feeding in infancy is still embedded in the experience of overarching bodily care, it increasingly crystallizes as the essential dimension of care interactions. A typical observation was that a toddler between 1 and 2 years old would approach the mother, drink immediately, and, after the meal was finished, quickly rejoin the other children. To facilitate weaning, mothers explained, they sometimes applied spicy substances to their nipples. This may have caused some weaning conflicts, although I never observed them (cf. Fouts, Hewlett, and Lamb 2005). However, at the age of weaning, other ways of feeding, which caregivers introduced in early infancy (around 3 months), were already well established, and mealtimes continued to be the principal occasions for caregiver-child contact. Through this channeling process from continuous body-centered care to intermittent food-related contact, children may learn to experience feeding not just as a residue of care but rather as a central dimension in hierarchical relationships.

To be sure, hierarchical relationships do not evolve free of conflicts in Menamamy. In return for life sustenance, children from the age of 4 or 5 onward were expected to respect and obey their elders and to help their parents whenever asked. To enforce these expectations and to instill a kind of moral fear (*tahotsy*), disobedient children could be punished by beatings or food deprivation (for details, see Röttger-Rössler et al. 2013, 2015).

#### *Relationships*

The children of Menamamy seemed to form relationships with caregivers in a consecutive manner. As described earlier, mothers initially assumed the predominant role among caregivers, but they quickly relinquished this role as infants became toddlers. Changing feeding practices contribute to this expansion of relevant caregivers. While breastfeeding was the exclusive

12. Barlow (2013) proposes a similar pathway with regard to the Murik of Papua New Guinea.

prerogative of the mother, other kinds of feeding were frequently done by preadolescent child minders and occasionally by aunts and grandmothers. Through speech acts—that is, by having to address all these female relatives as *neny* (“mother”) or *neny be* (“grandmother”)—children were prompted to expand their understanding of the concept “mother” to other female relatives from the same or older generations.

Fathers and other male relatives were rarely directly engaged in feeding or other practices of bodily care (see fig. 1). Yet, in line with the patrilineal ideology, my interview partners described the role of fathers and of their ancestors as the original providers of children’s food and life force and as major authority figures. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when children came to “recognize” fathers in this role. It is clear, however, that when children reached about 5 years of age, fathers started to assert their role as authority figures and providers through (threats of) corporal punishment. All children I interviewed had clear memories of beatings or food withdrawal. For example, as one 14-year-old boy explained, “Once I refused to collect firewood because I was too tired, so my father did it by himself. Then he said: ‘You exist only through me. As you did not help me, you won’t have food tonight.’” By experiencing the father’s power to temporarily compromise their physical well-being, children could affectively grasp that their life was, under normal circumstances, sustained by him. As with female relatives, children had to address all of their father’s brothers or cousins as *ray* (“father”).

While the relationships within each collective category of father and mother evolved clearly in a hierarchical-sequential fashion, the role divisions between them entailed both sequential and complementary aspects. Ontogenetically, children’s relationships to fathers appear to build, at least in part, on earlier mother-child relationships. Ideologically, by contrast, fathers (and their ancestors) were presented as primordial sources of children’s lives. At the same time, their roles had a complementary dimension: mothers provided most of the proximal care, while fathers acted mainly as authority figures. Finally, these roles converge in a model of hierarchical relationships that is perhaps best expressed in an idiom that every child knows: *Ray aman-dreny Zagnahary hita masu!*: “Fathers and mothers are visible gods!”

In this section I have explored the formation of hierarchical relationships, which were central to providing for the children’s bodily needs and feelings of existential security (or fear) and which fostered a sociocentric and deferential mode of relating in children. Yet children’s lives in Menamaty were by no means confined to these socioemotional dimensions, as they simultaneously formed important egalitarian relationships with similar-aged children.

## The Formation of Egalitarian Relationships

### *Interaction Patterns*

To start with, I illustrate egalitarian interaction with an example. In search of one of the children for a spot observation, I passed

by a group of children playing with a wooden door lying on the ground. The six children were between 1 and 4 years old and related by kinship. They took turns jumping on one side of the door in order to rock the children sitting opposite. They laughed together, occasionally looked at each other, and exchanged words. After a while a 10-month-old boy came by and was invited by his 3-year-old brother to join in. Although he was obviously attracted by what he saw, he did not dare take a seat on the makeshift seesaw. Except for me, no adult was around—and no one had purposefully created this seesaw. As in this case, the partners in egalitarian interactions were hardly equals, given variations in age and competency. Yet their participation, even of the 10-month-old, depended on their own agency, and their interactions followed a reciprocal pattern. Playing jointly with objects, communicating face-to-face, and laughing together all imply reciprocity through sharing or turn taking. Such symmetric interaction patterns were virtually absent in hierarchical relationships (see fig. 2).

My data on face-to-face exchange, object play, and laughing can be generalized into broader patterns. While toddlers made little use of language with their caregivers, they could be very talkative in the company of other children. Dialogical ways of communication and, in particular, verbal exchanges about feelings, thoughts, and intentions appeared to be reserved for peer interactions. As children grew, they expanded object play into joint excursions to go fishing or to collect wild plants, as well as to cooperate in daily chores such as food preparation and cattle herding. Although parents assigned these chores, they were usually accomplished with other children. Laughing is an example of the general tendency of children to exchange intense positive and negative emotions with other children while they remain emotionally restrained in hierarchical relations. These observations correspond to extensive interviews with older children and adults, according to which emotions were overwhelmingly experienced, expressed, and acted out in the company of similar-aged social partners. A 11-year-old boy, for example, told me, “After I have done my chores and eaten, I go to my friends to have fun. We laugh a lot, and my heart is cheerful [*mangoa*] and happy [*ravo*].” A 5-year-old provided an example of negative emotions: “Once, I was playing with my friends in the rain. I slipped and my friends jeered at me. I got very angry [*maseky*] and threw mud at them. Then we went swimming in the river.” As I have described in detail elsewhere (Scheidecker 2020), children learn from early on to regulate and express their anger in different ways according to whether the relationship is hierarchical or egalitarian.

### *Ontogenetic Changes*

The steep increase in child-to-child contact across the first 3 years should not hide the fact that it was already frequent among 3-month-olds (see fig. 1e). While infants were still carried most of the time by their caregivers, they could simultaneously direct their attention and activities toward other children. In this way they reflected their caregivers’ tendency to

focus on their own peers or tasks while being physically available to the child. Such a social-relational division of the child's visual and bodily attention continues throughout childhood and, I would argue, across a person's entire life span. While child-to-caregiver contact and child-to-child interactions often coincided in infancy, they quickly split in space and time once children began to walk. Toddlers usually played somewhat apart from caregivers in the village or its vicinity. From around the age of 5, children would go for most of the day on joint excursions outside the village, often fishing, hunting for birds, collecting wild fruit, or, in the case of older boys, herding cattle. According to my interviews with 98 children, all of them had begun between the ages of 5 and 8 to spend the night with other children in a room or house separate from their parents' quarters.

This early and sustained orientation to other children appeared to be based on a strong child-to-child attraction. Infants could frequently be seen taking great pains to move toward other children, even before they were able to properly walk. As their mobility increased, especially once they learned to walk, they could keep track of other children more easily. Thus, increasing mobility, along with decreasing time demand for bodily care, allowed for the steep rise in child-to-child company. I assume that this child-to-child attraction was fostered by the specific social conditions, in particular, complementary role division. Since caregivers focused on children's physical needs, peers were exclusively available as stimulating play partners. Furthermore, caregivers ensured from early on that their children were actually exposed to other children. Infants were made to face children while either sitting on the caregivers' laps or close by on the ground. Preadolescent child minders usually took their charges to a group of children. In this way, the infant could interact with similar-aged children while the child minder was free to play with his or her own peers. Mothers sometimes actively drew their infants' attention to other children by pointing, turning, or pushing their body toward them. This usually happened when the child turned their face to the caregiver, was reluctant to leave the mother's lap, or was whining for reasons other than bodily needs. On several occasions I observed mothers refocusing the attention of infants who were about to cry after being hit by another child. While the affected children turned to their mothers, the mothers turned them back to the perpetrator, sometimes guiding their arms to slap him. Thus, caregivers prompted infants to turn to other children not only for exploration but also for the regulation of conflicts.

The early segregation of children and caregivers can be ascribed to several factors. Adults expected children to be calm in their presence and, consequently, angrily drove them away when their play became too noisy. Correspondingly, toddlers could interact with less restraint and more freedom without adults close by. Older children explained that they avoided parents for most of the day in order to evade criticism, disciplining, or the assignment of tasks. Furthermore, parents followed a "policy" of noninterference regarding children's affairs. Even if parents were close enough to see what was going on among children, they usually did not intervene, not even if

children were fighting. Parents explained that to intervene in toddlers' quarrels would drive them crazy or, in the worst case, would spread conflicts to the parents. The pattern of noninterference was also manifest in the toddlers' material environment. They played neither in specially designed or protected spaces nor with toys created by adults expressly for children. As the makeshift seesaw exemplifies, children made use of all kinds of materials or objects that were not in use (anymore) by adults and could serve their purposes.

The emergence of egalitarian relationships in Menamaty represents a stark departure from the Western urban middle-class context, which has arguably been the model for theorizing about children and their social partners. In these contexts, infants usually experience playful, expressive, and stimulating ways of interacting first with their parents. In Menamaty, children experienced them from the start with other children. When children in Western settings begin to interact more regularly with peers, for example, in day care institutions, where they may even create their own peer culture (Corsaro 2009), they remain under the close and constant supervision of caregivers. Caregivers not only intervene in peer interactions, especially in the case of conflicts, but also purposefully create children's activity settings by, for example, going to playgrounds or giving the children toys, games, or books. By contrast, children's peer activities in Menamaty were created and transmitted among similar-aged children, largely unmediated by caregivers' pedagogical intentions and interventions. This does not mean that adult life was irrelevant to peer activities. In their games, children would generally imitate and re-create activities of adults that they saw on a daily basis, ranging from *kiaomby* ("playing" cattle) to *kibilo* ("playing" a possession ritual) to *kipetapetaky* ("playing" sexual intercourse).

### Relationships

While child-to-child interaction generally followed an egalitarian pattern, it was differentiated according to kinship, gender, and individual relationships. All of the children whose early years I learned about had several very close and lasting relationships with other children, mostly cousins of the same gender and similar age. They were said to be inseparable (*tsy mety misaraky*), as they could be seen most of the day in each other's company. Parents and other caregivers could immediately point out the closest "friends," even of infants. Children publicly displayed their special relationships through physical intimacy: boys frequently held hands while strolling around the village, and girls often exchanged clothes with their closest friends or braided each other's hair, which was a time-consuming task. This behavior again was in stark contrast to the respectful physical distance that characterized hierarchical relations. In many regards, these relationships were more than what is commonly implied by the term "friendship." They were bound by kinship ties and grew up side by side, from birth on constantly available for each other. Their evolving relationships were unlikely to be disrupted, since causes common in other societies, such as

the relocation of nuclear families or the change of care facilities, generally did not exist in Menamaty.

While infants seemed to interact with peers regardless of their gender, the majority of activities became gender specific in the second year of life. Nevertheless, most children were known to have at least one special friend of the opposite gender. Furthermore, children as young as 3 learned to differentiate between kin (*longo*) and nonkin or “enemies” (*arahamba*) and to direct their aggressive tendencies toward the latter. In these *arahamba* relationships, children acquired specific emotions of retaliatory anger, which I have described in detail elsewhere (Scheidecker 2020). Thus, there was also a pronounced complementary role division among children’s peers.

To conclude the current and previous sections, I return to my initial claim that in Menamaty egalitarian and hierarchical relationships evolve in a complementary, and not in a sequential, fashion. According to the hierarchical-sequential model, peer relationships partly derive from preceding infant-caregiver relationships, gain in relative prominence during childhood, and ultimately replace caregivers in many domains. As Brown and Larson (2009) note, in adolescence “young people become likely to spend more time with age mates, often with reduced oversight by adults” and, “in some arenas, peers compete with adults as a significant source of influence on adolescent attitudes, activities, and emotional well-being” (75). In attachment research, it is assumed that adolescents’ close friendships or romantic relationships emerge through the “transfer of attachments from parents to peers” (Zeifman and Hazan 2016:418).

My contrasting suggestion—that caregiver-child and child-to-child relationships in Menamaty emerge in a complementary way—is based on several observations. First, from infancy on, both caregivers and child partners were continuously available and provided distinct social experiences: asymmetrical body-centered care, on the one hand, and a wide array of symmetrical, emotionally stimulating interactions, on the other. Ontogenetically, these distinct modes remained stable, leading to the formation of distinct hierarchical and egalitarian socioemotional registers. This ontogenetic continuity can also be traced through individual relationships to parents, whose psychological influence remained strong, even after death, as powerful ancestral spirits, as well as to similar-aged relatives such as cousins, whose bonds were established in early childhood and usually remained throughout life. While hierarchical relationships were central to children’s physical well-being, children depended almost exclusively on other children for a wide range of crucial needs, including play and exploration, active and expressive roles in social interaction, and the exchange of intense emotions.

## Conclusion

In this contribution, I have proposed the concept of complementarity as an alternative to the conventional hierarchical-sequential understanding of children’s social partners and re-

lationship formation. By way of example, I have described the specific complementary patterns in the social world of infants and toddlers in a rural community in Madagascar. I demonstrated a pronounced role division between caregivers and related similar-aged child partners and argued that their distinct interaction patterns lead to the parallel formation of hierarchical and egalitarian social-emotional registers.

Comparable patterns of complementarity may be present in other social settings around the world, particularly if they entail similar social conditions, such as (a) the constant availability of a considerable number of related children from birth onward, (b) pronounced hierarchical adult-child relationships that make other children indispensable for a number of needs and desires requiring reciprocal modes of interaction, and (c) the lack of formal day care or educational facilities that would involve increased supervision and structuring of child-to-child interactions by adults. According to the ethnographic record, such conditions are present in many rural communities around the world (for reviews, see Lancy 2008; Weisner 2015; Whiting and Whiting 1975).

However, these are certainly not the only patterns outside Western middle-class contexts. The social world of children in several forager societies, for instance, has been characterized by egalitarian adult-child relations, including close relationships to fathers, and by a group of related mixed-age children (see, e.g., Boyette and Hewlett 2017; Fouts and Lamb 2009; Hewlett 1992; Konner 1976b; Tronick, Morelli, and Ivey 1992). Obviously, these conditions should lead to different role divisions. Moreover, complementary role divisions can be expected to change quickly, possibly even representing a dimension through which children are first and foremost affected by social transformation. Migration, for example, may abruptly remove children from whole segments of their social world, for instance, from a number of close similar-aged relatives; confront them with new categories of social partners, such as unrelated same-aged peers; and create expectations on parents to assume new roles toward their children that were previously performed by others.<sup>13</sup> How exactly these patterns vary cross-culturally and change over time needs to be further explored.

If complementarity in the social world of children is indeed widespread, though not necessarily universal, it is worth asking why it has rarely been fully accounted for. When looking back at the considerable part of my field research during which I focused unwittingly on caregivers, I see a number of conditions that foster a caregiver bias. First, most of the established theories on child development focus on caregiver-child interaction (see Hay, Caplan, and Nash 2009). Second, most researchers and research populations belong to the Western educated classes, characterized by a particularly strong preoccupation with caregiving or “intensive parenting” (Faircloth 2014). In addition to such ethnocentric tendencies, adult-centric effects might also reinforce a caregiver bias. As adults, researchers are most likely

13. See Ward (2019) for an example of how such shifts in the social world of children in Ambo Tibet affect language acquisition.

inclined to think first of adult influences when reflecting about child development. Ethnographic research procedures do not necessarily counter these biases, as interviews and conversations are usually conducted with caregivers. Thus, even the cultural models of child-rearing, which are central in anthropology and cultural psychology, may actually just represent the perspectives of particular social partners. When the caregivers in Menamaty talked about child-rearing, they mainly talked about their own concerns as caregivers. Participant observation may again be limited by the tendency to approach children only when they are engaged in typical caregiver-child situations, as doing so seems more socially appropriate for adult researchers. Even if children are encountered without caregivers, one's own adult presence usually creates an adult-child constellation and dynamic. More recent research that has helped to overcome such a caregiver bias, however, has tended to focus exclusively on child-to-child relationships and associated domains of activity, often in conjunction with paradigmatic shifts. However, to get a full view of complementary patterns, it is necessary to look across categories of social partners, domains of activity, and associated approaches.

The concept of complementarity proposed here also has theoretical implications. Most classic ethnographies on childhood, emotion, and self in rural communities of the world converge on the claim that children in these communities acquire a strong sociocentric orientation with an emphasis on respect and emotional restraint, among other things (e.g., Briggs 1998; LeVine et al. 1994; Levy 1978; Lutz 1988). Studies in cultural and cross-cultural psychology have come to similar conclusions (e.g., Friedlmeier, Corapci, and Cole 2011; Markus and Kitayama 1991). A complementarity view on the social world of children may orient researchers more toward the possibility that these observations pertain only to one part of children's social reality, that is, to their relationships with caregivers. In Menamaty, children acquire an emotionally expressive, self-assertive mode in relation to similar-aged children, which strongly contrasts the restrained, sociocentric mode of hierarchical relationships, and they learn to switch between these different registers according to the social situation.

Finally, complementarity is of practical and ethical relevance, especially in regard to early childhood development programs. As indicated in the introduction, parenting interventions with the aim of augmenting children's cognitive stimulation may be entirely misguided if applied in communities where social partners other than the parents are the primary contributors to this developmental domain. A complementarity approach can help assess children's social experiences more adequately and prevent unjustified or misplaced interventions.

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## Comments

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### Toward a Theory of Diversity in Complementary Social Relationships

In the target article, Scheidecker proposes complementarity as an alternative approach to the hierarchical-sequential perspective on the development of children's social relationships that is traditional to developmental psychology. He sets the stakes for finding such an alternative approach by critiquing the perspective held by the international aid community and mainstream psychology that caregivers, especially parents, are the sole providers of children's developmental needs. He then develops his theoretical intervention, illustrated by a mixed-method, child-focused ethnographic account of early childhood social development in a Bara commune in Madagascar.

I laud Scheidecker for challenging ethnocentric bias in human development interventions. I agree these are misguided. His focus on early childhood peer relationships also fills a gap in the literature. In particular, his data showing the extent of very early face-to-face peer interactions are novel, to my knowledge. In the context of his broader ethnography demonstrating the value of peers across the life span, these data support his contention that early development of these relationships parallels those with mothers and other caretakers in Menamaty. Given these strengths, my commentary will focus on his theoretical intervention. In particular, I argue that while complementarity may be a useful catchall for the dynamic contributions a child's social partners make to his or her development, it does not offer the robust, integrative theoretical framework we need to explain patterns of diversity and similarity across human childhoods.

First, it is empirically clear that children's early social relationships are diverse across human societies—in their range of partners, their frequency of interaction, the domains in which these interactions occur, and the culturally constructed affective nature of particular relationships (Keller and Bard 2017; Lancy 2008; Quinn and Mageo 2013). However, there are also broad commonalities. Evolutionary theory has been useful for understanding both similarity and variation across populations. For instance, mothers are cross-culturally central to development, as among other primates and mammals, because they



are primary providers of infant nutrition (Hrdy 1999) and are also commonly the primary providers of early physical contact critical for development of other physiological systems (McKenna and Gettler 2016). Scheidecker's data provide continued support for mothers as central in this domain. Fatherhood, in contrast, is a derived but facultative feature of human cooperative caregiving that, evidence suggests, evolved through the advantages of complementarity between men and women in the context of a division of labor (Gettler, Boyette, and Rosenbaum 2020). In this sense, evolutionary theory predicts that men will tend to contribute to their children's development in different ways than mothers, commensurate with their different social roles. Cross-cultural evidence supports this prediction (Lamb 2010; Mattison, Scelza, and Blumenfeld 2014; Scelza 2010; Shenk and Scelza 2012). As such, where men and women's roles are more similar, one would expect greater overlap in the ways in which men and women complement each other's care, as one finds, for instance, among some small-scale egalitarian societies (e.g., Hewlett 1991).

While not the focus of the target article, a robust approach to social developmental dynamics should not ignore complementarities between parents or other caretakers only to emphasize those between caretakers and peers. Indeed, it seems less useful to distinguish between these two categories of social partner than it does to distinguish between activities within which different social partners interact with a child. In this sense, the notion that other children have roles complementary to those of adults is not new.

For example, while focused on middle instead of early childhood, Piaget proposed that the peer group is central to children's moral development (Piaget 1932). Within children's play groups, he argued that understandings of norms were facilitated by games played among mixed-age peers. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development concept is also based on the idea that cognitive development is best supported through guidance appropriate for a child's developmental level, such as through interaction with more capable peers. The sociohistorical school, of which Vygotsky is one key figure, emphasized activities as the unit of analysis. An activity might be any interaction between peers (or others) and can affect development through feedback between those interacting. For example, the object play, smiling, or laughing Scheidecker observed among Bara toddlers can be seen as part of broader activity systems constituted by a community, material culture, social norms and institutions, and role divisions (Cole and Engeström 1993). Complementarity emerges from these systems.

In Menamaty, it seems these early childhood interactions have pragmatic origins (from the caregiver perspective) and an affective tone that are together structured by and developmentally constitutive of the contrasting hierarchical/egalitarian emotional modes Scheidecker observed between different- versus same-aged social partners, respectively (Greenfield et al. 2003). Activity systems in Western, middle-class contexts are different. Indeed, we ought to acknowledge that a hierarchical-sequential model of social development is perhaps most appropriate for

those settings from which this model was derived—one constituted by isolated, typically small nuclear families and a cultural emphasis on early cognitive development and meritocracy. There are still complementarities across development in these contexts—between parents, other family members, childcare services, and peers. As Scheidecker notes, many argue that peer relationships serve a critical developmental role within Western societies, too, but they become prominent and less dependent on adult influence during middle childhood or adolescence, not as very early as he observed in Menamaty.

Evolutionary theory provides a foundation on which to predict broad patterns of diversity and commonality in complementarity. Other frameworks help point the analytical lens at activities engaged in by particular complementary relationships as they are constituted within sociocultural settings. But, ultimately, we ought to ask: how does variation in these diverse developmental systems impact variation in outcomes such as cognitive development or well-being? As part of this larger project, mixed-method, ethnographic work like Scheidecker's is essential for characterizing diversity in social-developmental dynamics.

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#### Care of Young Children in the Majority World

In sharp contrast to affluent countries of the West, children in the majority world are brought up very differently, and many features of family life and social organization transcend national boundaries. Most children are born into a large and complex network of people who involve themselves in different aspects of care simultaneously and organize these relationships strategically along socially valued ideas and goals (Chaudhary 2021). Contrary to these cultural patterns, the academic study of childhood and family life in developmental psychology is preoccupied with issues of childhood care, development, and education that draw inspiration from a few influential theories built around Western ideology (Arnett 2008; Burman 2016). Consequently, developmental psychology has given sparse attention to cultural diversity in comparison with sister disciplines such as social anthropology, sociology, cultural and cross-cultural psychology, and cultural studies.

This commentary builds on the lead article by Scheidecker to emphasize the urgent need for cross-disciplinary collaboration in the study of children's development and care so that the evidence base of developmental psychology can expand to include cultural difference as a basic aspect of the human condition rather than an ancillary fact. Adopting a wider lens will facilitate the inclusion of phenomena such as multiple caregiving, multigenerational family networks, fewer resources, rural and periurban ecologies, sibling caregiving, informal learning, and multilingualism, to name a few. As Scheidecker argues,

concerns also relate to practical implications of culturally uninformed theory and method. Early childhood interventions rely exclusively on a narrow and culturally specific understanding of childhood and family life. Let alone diversity of subjects, rarely has the evidence from different disciplines been included.

As a cultural, developmental psychologist living and working in India, I have been deeply concerned about the reluctance to understand diversity. This dissent received sustained support from scholars working in fields such as cultural psychology, anthropology, and economics. However, in developmental psychology, examples of “others” remained limited to “textboxes in textbooks” (Chaudhary and Sriram 2020:118; Chaudhary et al. 2022), placed merely as exceptions to prove the rule: that children are best cared for exclusively by their parents, with most attention to the disposition of and guidance from the mother. In the year 2010, after a detailed scrutiny of publications in psychology, Henrich and his colleagues (Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan 2010) unearthed a peculiar fact about psychology. Although the discipline assumed universal validity, research studies on which these publications were based drew from a narrow range of subjects, namely, members of Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) societies in the West. These samples do not, in fact, represent the populations even within the West (Henrich 2020). Despite this glaring exposure, bias in sampling has sustained, and a genuine attention to diversity in family life and caregiving remains largely unattended and mostly misunderstood. For practical applications like global interventions, the affiliation to a singular model remains even more faithful. There are several reasons for this trend.

Supported by the spread of capitalism and commerce, countries in the Global South are bound within the problems of postcolonial politics and subaltern positioning. In university teaching and research, for instance, the influence of Western publications and materials (like research techniques and assessment tools) has been overarching. Despite that fact of living very different lives, scholars in countries like India look westward for inspiration and training, leaving progressive scholars with very few spaces to examine local ideologies and practices. This “northern ventriloquism” (Naidu 2021) facilitates an entry into the global world of academic exchange, and majority countries look eagerly to the West for progressive solutions to scientific discovery and economic advancement. Naidu describes northern ventriloquism as the tendency of LMIC (low-middle-income-country) scholars to enunciate HIC (high-income-country) ideas to access global grants and publish internationally. This admiration facilitates the spread of Western science and technology and, in this instance, Western childcare practices. It is not surprising, therefore, that most international intervention agencies such as UNICEF and WHO employ local scholars to extend and promote their policies (Chaudhary et al. 2022). These scholars are well rewarded for their participation in such projects by receiving much higher salaries in comparison to their local counterparts. This is a clear instance of local “brain drain” in countries such as India and Bangladesh.

The call for a change in the lead article by Scheidecker is compelling. With detailed attention to the literature, the author presents a range of evidence to support the need for a shift in focus away from nuclear families and maternal dominance in theory, research, and practice. This is just one of the possible settings for child-rearing, not the only one. The evidence is already in place, and to some extent, publications have begun to reflect on this change, but enduring trends are hard to replace. Cultural diversity is a complex reality, and a lot more work needs to be done to make a discernible difference to the discipline. By providing an alternative model for understanding social relationships, Scheidecker argues that doing so facilitates an ecologically valid understanding of the children’s lives in Menamaty. Remaining bound by the assumption of hierarchical adult-child interactions does not leave room for an adequate exploration and explanation of children’s interactions with each other that are a crucial portion of their social lives. This is a demonstration of how changing position and widening the lens can facilitate cultural understanding. Such shifts are crucial and emancipatory.

The serious problem of global interventions needs further attention. As mentioned earlier, it is in this worldwide network that there is a complete blindness to cultural diversity and cultural difference is treated as deficit, something in need to change to fit in with the global model. In such a project, the complementary social relationships among the Menamaty would not figure, and their lives will seem even more impoverished than they already are (considered to be). Based on that argument, these children will be assumed to face cognitive, social, and emotional deficit on account of poor social experiences, discounting the fact that they have, in fact, intensely collaborative exchanges with other children. However, if that is not an element in an assessment tool, it would go potentially unnoticed. This is the strategy because of which entire countries are viewed as substandard. This is unjustifiable and unethical, especially since there is sufficient evidence to suggest that care in the affluent world is very high on material resources that a majority of the world’s people just cannot afford.<sup>14</sup> Still the persuasion that children’s cognitive capacities are lacking because they do not have access to reading material or day care (McCoy et al. 2022) is being used to promote the notion of gold standards in caregiving. The naturally available resources around children in rural and tribal areas, the complexity of their social lives, and the richness of the ecology remain hidden from the limelight, treated as aberrations rather than affordances.

As Scheidecker urges in this article, this position is no longer justifiable, and we need to consolidate the work on global communities across disciplines to emphasize the need for cultural understanding and act with social justice. Subtracting the most socially prevalent and valued experiences of children’s lives simply because these do not form a part of the research agenda

14. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/11/why-child-care-so-expensive/602599/>.

amounts to epistemic violence. This is not to deny the need for assistance but to focus on culturally meaningful and socially adapted forms of advice rather than attempting to make changes that could potentially create an imbalance in the already precarious lives of people with fewer resources. Undeniably, labeling people who live in difficult circumstances automatically as poor caregivers is a double injustice. First, they are poor, and, second, they are labeled as poor caregivers who inevitably transfer the deficit to future generations. This implies that people living with fewer resources will remain so until they start living like the wealthy! How has such a policy come to pass? Why have we let this injustice persist? These are burning questions for a more just appreciation of diversity and difference.

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In “Parents, Caregivers, and Peers: Patterns of Complementarity in the Social World of Children in Rural Madagascar,” Gabriel Scheidecker helpfully challenges the primacy of parental caregiving in research on and international interventions in toddlerhood. His deep engagement with “the matter of the child” (Mitchell 2014:6) in the context of southern Madagascar is valuable not only because the attention paid to children as important social actors in ethnographic analyses is still rare but also for his emphasis on thinking children with other children, and not with adults first, in order to grasp the diversity of processes of socialization—“the period of life prior to socially recognized adulthood” (Morton 1996:7)—as interactional models of development that acknowledge “that social development involve[s] reciprocal influences” (9).

By questioning the normativity of such parent-centric approaches, Scheidecker builds a strong case for the need to broaden the range of social partners considered relevant in young children’s development and the complementary, not consecutive, fashion in which they develop. The notion of “complementarity”—which his argument foregrounds—is illustrated along some patterns that he finds in children’s lives and relationships with caregivers and similar-aged children in the rural village commune Menamaty. Centering simultaneity rather than alternation in children’s being and becoming offers an inclusive perspective onto a field of research that is still frequently viewed through a lens of hierarchization.

The particular focus on the importance of children’s social interaction with social partners other than parents or appointed caregivers underlines the idea of complementarity as a lens through which to view, more holistically, the relationships of caregiving and care receiving that children coconstitute and that emerge in parallel, not in sequence. Scheidecker’s emphasis on the “and” in the analysis of relationships in children’s lives in

Madagascar—thinking children *with* parents *and* peers, on a spectrum of interactions and not in terms of either/or—offers a welcome intervention into still often fragmented approaches to understanding children’s lives anthropologically and beyond normative hierarchy.

Thinking along the lines of complementarity allows us to think more critically about meanings and sources of caregiving and to see children, too, as actively assuming caring roles toward other children in their everyday lives. This emphasis on the critical possibility that similar-aged social partners who are not officially in charge or commonly reflected on as caregivers may provide stimulating experiences to infants and toddlers moves beyond linear conceptualizations of children’s social worlds and the relationships and caretaking practices that constitute them.

Jean Hunleth (2017), for example, recently described such an egalitarian perspective strikingly in her ethnography on children as caregivers in the context of tuberculosis and HIV in Zambia. Her ethnography showed that “children . . . were integral to TB treatment adherence” as “they carried out household chores, sibling care, and care for the sick that made the collection of medication possible” (153). When infrastructures lack, she argued, “children help make up for the absences” (153). Scheidecker’s insights complement this view and make clear that it is important not just to think with children’s active and important roles as providers of support and care when certain infrastructures are not in place but, more generally, to consider their doing in addition, and as social infrastructure in its own right, to other organizations of everyday life.

Scheidecker’s ethnography offers a variety of relevant insights that support his claim for the importance of complementary thinking: he observes, for example, that for children up to the age of 15 months, other preadolescent children between 10 and 13 years were critical companions (*nama*) and in fact more frequently present in their immediate environments than nonparental adults or the father, acting, for example, as child minders (*mpitan-zaza*, lit., “child holder”). Further, for 1-year-olds, Scheidecker documents, they spent about as much time with children aged 0–9 as with mothers, and “2-year-olds spent more than 50% and 3-year-olds almost 70% of their time with other young children.”

Zooming in on this wide range of social partners in infants’ and toddlers’ lives in Menamaty—to a large degree children who were related, for example, as cousins—underlines the critical importance of thinking with these young social actors’ impact on each other’s living situations. This holds particularly true in regard to the fact that adult “caregivers did not consider play and cognitive stimulation to be their domain of responsibility” but felt mostly responsible for ensuring children’s physical health and bodily development. Scheidecker’s observation that affectionate practices of body contact were also more present in child-to-child relationships than in caregiver-child relations elicits the complementarity of different developmental domains in young children’s lives and how they are formed.

A key contribution that Scheidecker makes with his work is to the continued contestation of the ethnocentricity underlying

to the fields of research and interventions regarding children's lives. Much like I propose in my own work on the need to broaden and decolonize our understandings of what in policy language is frequently termed "child protection" (e.g., Fay 2019a, 2019b), Scheidecker unsettles prevailing normative notions of socialization and calls for a complementarity not only in thinking children with their peers but also in thinking research with policies and their implementation.

As I show in my ethnographic work on child protection in Zanzibar (e.g., Fay 2021, 2022), hierarchical and Eurocentric understandings of and approaches to what protection is and how it is to be enforced by international children's rights organizations are frequently not considered in continuation, or through a lens of complementarity, with Zanzibari conceptualizations of the matter. Through his own ethnographic account, Scheidecker unravels a similar disconnection that may contribute to more robust approaches of research on and intervention in early childhood that does not primarily think with the hierarchical and Eurocentric assumption that parents are first and foremost the principal caregivers and, following that, also children's key social partners to study. Centering children's peers, too, as substantial social partners for children in egalitarian relationships moves beyond a Western, urban, middle-class understanding in which these roles are traditionally attributed more hierarchically and opens ground for theorizing outside of these less flexible frameworks.

Ultimately, Scheidecker's piece contributes to counter the fact that "the situation of children is frequently misapprehended" (Reynolds 2019:7) and that the complementarity expressed in children's and adults' contributions to social life—whether in settings of health care, child labor, or more broad matters of childhood socialization—are "an important dimension of cross-cultural variation that needs to be considered to avoid serious ethnocentric fallacies."

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It is all about complexity.

The study program presented in Gabriel Scheidecker's paper "Parents, Caregivers, and Peers: Patterns of Complementarity in the Social World of Children in Rural Madagascar" necessitates a paradigm shift in the understanding of children's development. There is consensus in the scientific community that social relationships are crucial for children's development in all domains. However, theorizing and research have been driven by an adult-centric perspective. This view culminates in attachment theory, where one adult caregiver, usually the mother, is assumed to play the crucial role for shaping children's overall development. Children may also form relationships (attachments) to other adults, yet they are believed to be organized in a hierarchical order.

However, cultural anthropologists and psychologists have also reported siblings and other children as being significant social partners and caregivers of children, yet observations nevertheless often center on adult-child encounters, and child-to-child contact is not systematically studied. Moreover, the development of social relationships is assumed to follow a sequential logic with primacy of child-adult relationships. Relationships with other children may be developed once relationships with one or a few adults are established. Another taken-for-granted, implicit assumption is that small children cannot manage complex social (and physical) environments, so responsible caregivers need to reduce the stimulation input to a minimum. Finally, this scenario is regarded as universal and normative, that is, the best developmental condition for children everywhere. It is therefore, as Gabriel Scheidecker exemplifies, adopted in large-scale intervention programs worldwide.

Scheidecker offers and elaborates the conception of complementarity as a different developmental scenario that radically questions the universal validity of the assumptions described before. Complementarity in this sense implies that different social formats develop at the same time without denying development change over time. In an exemplar ethnographic field study in villages in the south of Madagascar, he documented with a mixed method design with whom children spend time during the first years of life and what the social encounters were about. He applied ethnographic assessments, participant observation, spot observations, and interviews with children and adults. With also recognizing his own observational biases, such as concentrating first on child-adult encounters, he was able to document that the children in these villages develop two social registers at the same time: a hierarchical one with adults and an egalitarian one with other children. Both registers follow different social conventions with different behaviors and different rules and norms. The study demonstrates that it is important to assess with whom children interact but also what the interactions are about and how they are enacted. Both registers persist over time, yet their prevalence changes over time. Whereas the amount of time spent with adults dominates during the first year, the time decreases substantially to almost zero with about three years. The time spent with social partners is dependent on children's needs, with care being most prominent in the beginning because of children's altriciality and immobility.

Scheidecker wants to reserve the term "caregiver" accordingly to the persons in children's social networks who actually physically care for children. Social care in terms of stimulation, emotional exchanges, play, and the like would constitute a different category of social behavior and education. The separation in terminology may help to prevent implicit biases in addressing predominantly adults in social exchanges with children.

Gabriel Scheidecker's study program demonstrates different important things. Children's development cannot be regarded as following a universal script. The example of children from pastoral/agrarian families in the south of Madagascar demonstrates a pattern that is completely different from what is considered

normative in theory and practice, thus extending the global knowledge base (see also Keller 2022).

Children can handle and obviously enjoy a substantial amount of complexity in terms of social partners and social rules. They are in touch with different adults and children from the beginning, varying in presence, variety, and intensity of contact. They learn simultaneously to associate different behaviors and social rules with the different actors. This is very different from the mainstream practice of exposing children only to a small cutout of the surrounding social (and physical) world. Moreover, children participate in the real life of families and villages and are not segregated into particular children's spaces. From the perspective of a Madagascan Menamaty family, Western middle-class babies grow up in a rather impoverished world.

The South Madagascan families are a case in point. There are possibly similarities with subsistence-based-farming families in other African, Asian, or South American villages. Yet Gabriel Scheidecker's research program does not replace the meticulous assessment of other realities the way he has documented it for the villages he studied. As such, this study is exemplar for future research.

Overall, the research program demonstrates that the recognition of complexities is essential in the study of development. There are no simple methods or tests that are able to assess the reality. Ethnographic research is difficult and time consuming, but there is no way to circumvent or replace it. Development needs to be regarded as contextualized. Without knowing the context, its affordances and constraints, as well as behavioral patterns, cannot be understood.

Interesting questions open up, for example, with respect to the formation of conceptions of the self. The current view is that socialization experiences like predominance of distal or proximal parenting have consequences for the development of cultural models in terms of hierarchical relatedness and psychological autonomy and thus shape conceptions of the self (Keller and Kärtner 2013). These prototypical models can be differently combined, for example, in urban educated families in non-Western countries or in migration contexts. The socialization conception of complementarity offers a new look into the dynamics of such combinations while they develop. Last but not least, abandoning the universalist and normative view would allow more ethical research and practice.

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Scheidecker has contributed a thoroughly original and insightful analysis of alloparenting or, this case, sib-care. Heretofore, the emphasis in anthropological and cross-cultural studies has been on establishing the universality of alloparenting or, more generally, cooperative breeding (Hrdy 2005). Numerous studies have followed children and tallied whom they spent time with and who was immediately at hand to succor them.

For example, "Central African Efe mothers are not always the first to nurse their new infant, who, at four months, will spend 60 percent of the time being cared for by many other band members. The child will, in fact, be passed around the band, an average of 8.3 times per hour" (Tronick, Morelli, and Winn 1987:99). The Efe toddler spends his or her days in the company of sib-caregivers, and "the number of child caregivers who assisted a mother was positively related to the time that mothers spent acquiring food away from camp" (Henry, Morelli, and Tronick 2005:202), as Scheidecker reports for the Bara that "2- and 3-year-old children spent only 10% of the time with their mothers; at 80% of the observations the mothers were not even in sight."

Data like these have been prominent in the wave of skepticism regarding the cornerstones of Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) psychology (Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan 2010). One such is attachment theory (Bowlby 1980), which makes no accommodation for alloparenting or any of a number of other common practices found outside the WEIRD monoculture (Otto and Keller 2014) that, collectively, make attachment theory seem more myth and mass movement than science (Faircloth 2013; Keller 2022).

Scheidecker's study is one of the first to analyze what might be called the alloparent's "job description." A mother asserts that her only responsibility is to "give him the breast." Even as she does so, her attention is directed elsewhere in carrying out a chore or gossiping. This model of the mother's role is repeated throughout the ethnographic record, as thoroughly recorded for the Kpelle of West Africa (Erchak 1992), the Batek of Borneo (Endicott and Endicott 2008), and the Mazahua of Mexico (Paradise 1996) to name just a few.

As the Bara infant becomes a toddler, contact with adults, including the mother, is discouraged, and they are to remain at a respectful distance. This phenomenon is so common in the ethnographic record it has been given a name: "toddler rejection" (Lancy 2022:140–141; Weisner and Gallimore 1977:176). However, the Bara toddler is guided into the company of siblings and cousins much like the Mandinka: "with the arrival of the next sibling, infancy is over. Now, play begins and membership in a social group of peers is taken to be critical to *nyinandirangho*, the forgetting of the breast to which the toddler has had free access for nearly two years or more. As one mother put it, 'Now she must turn to play'" (Whittemore 1989:92).

I can assert with some confidence that the Bara childcare cadre and division of labor is repeated in the majority of non-WEIRD societies (Lancy 2022). To my mind this strengthens the generalizability of Scheidecker's truly novel findings. Much of the literature dumps all preadolescents who live in proximity to a child aged from infancy through early childhood into the category of potential sib-caregivers. Scheidecker has successfully broken down this large and diverse group to show that roles vary depending on age and kinship. In this society preadolescents are the primary child minders and, accordingly, are free to assert their higher rank. The target children, however, seek out the companionship of near-same-age cousins in a more egalitarian relationship.

In light of Scheidecker's work, it would be a good idea to reexamine the roles played by children in childcare contexts. At present there is a large literature on children acting as managers of their assigned juniors whether in play (Lancy 1996) or in work (Weisner 1996), but too little attention has been paid to relationships in which the target child exercises greater agency.

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In this rich ethnographic paper, Gabriel Scheidecker makes a number of bold and original arguments. Based on his ethnographic fieldwork with pastoralist people of Menamaty in rural Madagascar, Scheidecker argues against a hierarchical understanding of child socialization, whereby parents and adults in general are perceived as the most important socializing agents. He suggests that we need to acknowledge that children's social partners are many and that they "may complement each other by providing different but equally significant experiences."

What is so original about noticing that children are socialized by peers and not just by their parents? As Scheidecker himself acknowledges, a number of researchers have already highlighted the contribution of peers and siblings to childcare (Weisner and Gallimore 1977; Whiting and Whiting 1975). However, Scheidecker's argument goes beyond merely adding peers to the list of social actors with whom children interact. He makes the powerful suggestion that we should not consider parents as the first and most important presence for children's emotional development—rather, we should see peers as contributing just as much as adults to a child's developmental path. Let us pause for a moment to consider the ramifications of such an argument. Scheidecker's suggestion goes directly against one of the strongest and most deeply held assumptions in Western psychology, that is, the idea that parents or adult caretakers shape children's emotional lives in ways that then have an impact on other interpersonal relationships later in life. This is at the core of attachment theories that have come to dominate contemporary parenting. Within the framework of contemporary psychology, peers figure only as secondary relationships—relationships that, valuable as they might be, occur only later in life and have thus considerably less effect on children's emotional development. While this might be the case among Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) nuclear families, where infants and toddlers spend time predominantly with their parents and have little contact with other children outside nursery school and kindergarten, it is not necessarily true in other contexts. The data Scheidecker compiles in his article are striking: in Menamaty, 1-year-old children spend the same amount of time with other children as they do with their mothers, 2-year-old children spend more than half of their time with other children, and finally, 3-year-old children spend 70% of their time with other children. These stunning numbers raise a

very legitimate question: how can peers *not* be influential for a Menamaty child when half of his or her time as a toddler is spent interacting with them?

The strength of Scheidecker's argument resides not only in his rich data but also in the clarity with which he shows the reader how adult caretakers and peers fulfil two different yet complementary roles in Menamaty children's lives: with adult caretakers, children interact following a hierarchical modality, whereas with other peers, children engage in egalitarian relationships, accessing an entirely different emotional landscape than that provided by adults. The originality of this paper lies in clearly showing how different social actors afford different—and yet equally fundamental—possibilities for emotional development. Such relationships are coterminous—one does not happen before the other, and one is not more important than the other. In other words, in Menamaty (and very possibly elsewhere) parental relationships do not provide a template for other interpersonal relationships. I think this is a terribly important argument to critically rethink about attachment and child emotional development.

While I find Scheidecker's argument very persuasive, I can see how it might seem very contentious for a reader outside the specific field of anthropology or cross-cultural psychology. One of the reasons one might find it hard to accept that peer relationships have a fundamental role in emotional socialization has to do with our skewed perception of what infants and young children are actually capable of doing. Let me give you an example of what I mean. It is very common to hear (at least in Italy and Germany) that children younger than 2 years old do not really know how to play together. Health experts and pediatricians (but, significantly, not nursery teachers!) have often told me that below that year children are interested only in having a relationship with their main caretakers (more specifically, the mother) and that they are too little to engage in real play with other young children. As proof of this popular belief, a quick search on Google Scholar for "peer play children one year old" held only one significant result (an article from 1988). Most research on children's play focuses on preschool children around the age of 5 years old. I suspect that the belief that toddlers cannot really interact meaningfully with each other rests on the idea that a full theory of mind—deemed necessary for predicting and understanding others' intentions and emotions—is said to start emerging at around 2 or 3 years of age and be fully developed only at 5 or 6 (see, however, Reddy 2010 for an alternative perspective). So our WEIRD psychological understanding of what very young children are actually capable of doing, both cognitively and emotionally, might impede us from acknowledging the influence they have on each other. If infants and toddlers cannot even engage in "real" play with each other, how can we even imagine them to have an effect on their peers' development? There is thus something important here regarding our very understanding of young children's abilities that requires critical scrutiny.

Finally, Scheidecker's insistence on the complementary and yet different nature of peers' and adults' contributions to the

emotional development of a child also made me wonder about the usefulness to keep these socializing experiences separated. Although Scheidecker does not say this explicitly, it seems clear that for the Menamaty, peers are social actors doing work that parents cannot or should not do (and vice versa). It is not that Menamaty mothers or adult caretakers could, if they wished, be equal partners to their children; they really should not. I think Menamaty emphasis on the division of labor in child socialization offers a really interesting contrast to contemporary parenting practices in WEIRD countries where parents are constantly undertaking conflicting roles, from engaging with children as equal partners (Ochs and Kremer-Sadlik 2015) to relating to them in ways that reveal and reinforce their emotional dependence (Whiting 1978). How can the Menamaty material help us to rethink the assumptions of a parenting model that asks parents to be simultaneously equal to and above children? This is a difficult question but one really worth pursuing, especially in light of the influence of WEIRD developmental psychology on early childhood interventions in the Global South. Decolonizing child development seems now more urgent than ever: I celebrate this paper as taking an important step in this direction.

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The dominant Euro-American narrative that parents are the principal or the primary caregivers in the socialization of children is being subjected to critical reflection (Scheidecker 2017). Child development research in traditional cultural pastoralist communities, for example, the Menamaty of Madagascar (Scheidecker 2017); African communities in Kenya including the Luo, Luhya, Bukusu, and Gusii (Okwany 2016); the Baganda community of Uganda; and the Nayaka of southern India (Lavi 2021), has opened a wide cross-cultural debate on the contribution of siblings and a network of kins as caregivers in the socialization of children. Among the Gusii community of Kenya, for example, infants are routinely cared for by both mothers and child caretakers. The mothers' roles are primarily to provide for the infant's physical needs, while the network of caretakers around the baby complements in play and social activities (Kermoian and Leiderman 1986).

In a Turkana pastoralist household in Kenya, for example, there are not less than 10 relatives interacting with a newborn child (Ng'asike 2019, 2010). The baby may be a grandchild or a child of kin or a baby of a visiting relative. An infant growing up in the midst of relatives and siblings in a pastoralist household can move from one hand to another until maturity when the toddler or the 2-year-old moves out to the playgrounds in the company of older siblings and neighborhood children. The idea of complementarity appreciates that childcare is not only a primary function of the mother but also a shared responsibility with the network of

caregivers who happen to be present around the mother and the child. In an African context, it takes a village to bring up a child (Swadener, Kabiru, and Njenga 1995). A child belongs to the mother only when in the womb (Serpell 1996). As soon as the child is born, the young one belongs to the network of relatives, siblings, uncles and aunts, grandparents, kinship, and the community at large in terms of caregiving and security. In the Turkana pastoralist's household, a baby is touched, talked to, cuddled, carried, and given blessings by relatives and visiting adults. The Turkana pastoralist child-rearing practices encourage maternal support once the baby is out of the womb. The community recognizes that it is a heavy task for the mother to carry the baby in the womb for nine months and continue to take care after delivery without assistance. Parental roles involve breastfeeding and carrying the baby on the back or by the chest, including emotional and physical stimulation. The mother performs these roles alongside the family household chores. These household chores may include fetching firewood or water, planting, cooking, attending to visitors, and so on. As a relief to the mother, the Turkana pastoralist places the responsibility of parenting on the network of family kinship and neighbors. Traditions require relatives to be closer to the mother to support her in the heavy responsibility of child upbringing. Thus, the availability of everyone around the baby at any available opportunity in the upbringing of the child becomes critical. In a pastoralist community, women are at the center of family livelihoods. For a woman who has a baby, it is a difficult experience to combine childcare with family household chores. The baby will be with siblings or with relatives in order to support the mother as the mother carries out family household chores. In preschools in Turkana, siblings carry their younger sisters and brothers on their backs as they attend lessons (Ng'asike 2019). During play, young children play side by side with older children at the homesteads. The community provides the security in which children are able to play and learn by themselves around the homesteads (Ng'asike 2022, 2015). Evidently, children in a rural pastoralist family do not spend the main part of their growth time with the mother but might spend more time with siblings, neighborhood children, and the community.

The Bukusu community of Kenya proverb "Every mother dances her baby" underlines the idea that child-rearing is a cultural practice that is unique to every community (Okwany 2016). From the African perspective, socialization is not a one-size-fits-all process but a problem-solving and trial-and-error journey unique to every African mother. The proverb underscores the view that in Africa, communities, families, and households have distinct and valued indigenous ways of childcare (Okwany 2016). Theories and concepts of child development should be framed from research in which the owners of the culture see their cultural world of children (Lansford et al. 2019). Super and Harkness (1986) argued that child development in African families must take into account the physical and social settings of the child's daily life, the customs and practices of child-rearing in the families, and the psychology of the caretakers, particularly parenting ethnotheories of child development. These theories

recognize that every culture has its unique knowledge of children's development and the need to appreciate that childhood is a cultural construction (Fleur, Hedegaard, and Tudge 2009). As a result, there is no universal knowledge of childhood that will be generalized to all children of other cultures. Instead, children should be viewed in the eye of the culture of the communities they belong to (Lansford et al. 2019).

Nsamenang (2008), observing social priming in socialization in families in a rural Nso community in western Cameroon, established that babies are cuddled and teased to smile along with adults; parents and other caregivers offer infants and toddlers food items and playthings and lure them both verbally and through nonverbal communication to return the "gifts." In this approach to socialization, a young child is inducted into the skills of sharing, cooperation, generosity, and preventing greediness or selfishness, which are values necessary for the development of social relationships. Teasing, cuddling, and challenging children to engage in adults' household tasks early is a responsibility of the mother, siblings, children, and network of kins (Nsamenang 2008). These practices are observable across African communities, for example, in Wolof child socialization practices in Senegal and among the Chewa and Tumbuka peoples of Zambia's Eastern Province (Barry and Zeitlin 2012).

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### The Significance of the "Significant Others" in an African Child's Life

A good note on which to commence this commentary is a phrase that was commonly used in the early 2000s when I began studying psychology at the University of Ghana: "the significant others." This phrase was used in discussion about social influence. It was used to imply "an individual who is or has been deeply influential in one's life, and in whom one is or once was emotionally invested, including members of one's family-of-origin and people encountered outside of family relations" (Andersen, Chen, and Miranda 2002:160). Gabriel Scheidecker's paper reminds me of this phrase as we discuss the social world of children. Indeed, it is wrong or even misleading to pontificate that the social relations of significance to a child are only the ones with their mothers or parents, especially in non-Western rural settings. The role of significant others in a child's social world is reflected in the African adage that "it takes a village to raise a child" (Willis 2012). It is understood in rural African communities that the responsibility for raising a child cannot be borne by parents alone. In essence, siblings, relatives of similar age, nonrelative playmates of similar age, other adult relatives, and sometimes other adult nonrelatives are important partners in providing the stimulating environment for the child's development. Thus, it is

misleading to conclude that African children receive inadequate cognitive stimulation based only on parent-child relations. I shall consider this an act of accidental epistemological violence (EV); however, a repeat of this practice shall be deemed an act of intentional EV (Oppong 2020). In the rest of this commentary, I shall address the following issues: (1) the concept of complementarity as a more realistic depiction of the African child's social world and (2) origins of the problem of categorizing children as caregivers. I then conclude by suggesting some means by which the significant others in the lives of African children can be targeted.

### Complementarity and Non-Western Children's Social World

The concept complementarity is a more realistic depiction of the social world of African children. African communities are often presented as hierarchical (Hofstede 2001). However, I agree with Gabriel Scheidecker that two modes of social interaction coexist in African settings: hierarchical and egalitarian modes. Often, the hierarchical mode is visible to outside observers, as they are more likely to observe parent/adult-child interactions or official community events where the hierarchy is most expressed. However, an equally significant mode is the egalitarian mode found in peer relations. It is important to point out that the interactions are more equal in peer relations but not necessarily equal, as there are still distinct age groups.

Another aspect of this concept that deserves mention is the division of labor in childcare. African parents tend to see to the physical needs of the child while other social partners see to the learning (including language development) and social needs of the child. I will cite my personal experience as an African father in a transnational family arrangement as an example. My youngest child, Akua, usually engages in play with her older siblings, Yaw and Yaa. However, Akua goes to her mother for nourishment. I am hardly physically available for the past four years but present through a symbolic representation of my significance in their lives. Thus, the depiction of the division of labor in childcare in Menamaty may reflect many African parents' reality. However, there are exceptions. African parents who live in the most affluent neighborhoods in African cities tend to re-create the social world of a middle-class Western family—nuclear family structure with(out) house help. Thus, the current focus on parents or mothers may reflect the social world of such few families in African urban settings.

### Origins of the Problem of Categorizing Children as Caregivers

Many stakeholders in early childhood (EC) development tend to have difficulty classifying children as caregivers. First, it is likely a Western perspective that children are vulnerable beings needing insulation from adults' world. Second, classifying children as caregivers makes others uncomfortable because of the concerns



of child labor (Sumberg and Sabates-Wheeler 2020). While it is recognized in Africa that childhood is a delicate stage of development, it is also seen as a period for learning societal expectations. Thus, a mother asking an older sibling to babysit for her while she carries out other functions ought to be seen as a learning opportunity for the older siblings; babysitting one's younger siblings does not and should not amount to harmful child's work. Thus, it may not be far fetched to consider them as caregivers as well. It does not imply that they have a primary responsibility for the child's welfare but that they perform an important function in the caregiving of their younger siblings.

## Conclusion

Targeting parents in EC interventions is often easier than targeting all the social partners of the child. There may not be sufficient project time or funds to do so. This difficulty is also reflected in the adage "It takes a village to raise a child." Must the EC interventionists target the entire community? There is also the issue of evaluation: it is often difficult to track impact beyond counting the number of activities in which the entire community participates; it is difficult to link these activities to project outcomes. This and other reasons make EC interventionists go the easy route of targeting only mothers in order to ensure accountability. Notwithstanding these difficulties, I would suggest that EC interventions should still target other social partners (especially other adults) through the mass media. In the case of siblings, curricular or extracurricular activities on caregiving to make them appreciate their impact on their younger siblings may be a good way to target them. Another way to target the children's playmates is to use Sunday schools/Madrasas and other available religious forums. Regardless of what Western interventionists do, mothers in non-Western societies will still call upon other social partners to complement their role in child caregiving.

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This theoretically ambitious paper draws on a remarkably detailed data set collected through systematic spot observations and ethnographic interviews in the isolated rural community of Menamaty in Madagascar. Scheidecker's analysis confirms and extends a growing critique of the rationale underlying early childhood development care and education (ECDCE) interventions designed by international organizations to enhance the cognitive and socioemotional development of young children in non-Western societies. A core component of that rationale is that indigenous socialization practices in the Majority World tend to neglect the need of young children for "responsive

caregiving" (WHO, UNICEF, World Bank 2018). Hence, it is argued that compensatory intervention is warranted to educate mothers in so-called best practices of parenting, such as talking to the infant, making eye contact, and playing with him or her. Critics have pointed out, however, that those practices are underwritten in Western, educated, industrialized, rich, democratic (WEIRD) societies more by cultural tradition than by scientific consensus. Other sociocultural systems have their own traditions with their own coherence that may be hazardous to disturb (Morelli et al. 2018b; Serpell and Nsamenang 2014).

Scheidecker distinguishes two major "modes" of social interaction: egalitarian and hierarchical. In egalitarian interactions the partners interact in a symmetrically reciprocal way such as sharing or turn taking, accompanied with eye contact and smiling. For infants in Menamaty, this was the dominant pattern of interaction with other children, whereas their interactions with adults were most often hierarchical. Indeed, when Menamaty parents were asked about play, they firmly rejected the suggestion that they might play with their infant and insisted that playful interaction is appropriate only among peers. Similar views have been expressed by parents in other rural African communities (e.g., Barry and Zeitlin 2012).

Mothers in Menamaty keep their infants close to them in the first few months of life, breastfeeding them on demand. But they also welcome participation in the care of their young child by other adult females and by preadolescent children aged 10–13, known as *mpitan-zaza*, child minders. From an early age, young Menamaty children are also encouraged to interact socially with peers of their own age. In this system of socially distributed childcare, young children experience different complementary types of interaction with different types of partners. Their mothers predominantly provide nutrition, while their preadolescent child minders and peers engage them in play.

According to the WHO/UNICEF (2018:12) framework, "responsive caregiving" is one of five essential components of "nurturing care," without which children are at risk of not reaching "their full potential." Moreover, "caregivers are the closest people to the young child in the period from pregnancy to age 3 and thus the best providers of nurturing care." This may be true of most mothers in the WEIRD societies whose children have dominated the research literature on child development and parenting. But the round-the-clock spot observations video taped by Scheidecker's research team found that the child's mother was the principal social partner within arm's reach only up to the age of 12 months. Thereafter, the child was more frequently found interacting with another child. At age 2–3 years, the mother was found within arm's reach of the child only 10% of the time.

The nurturing care framework draws on longitudinal follow-up studies of compensatory preschool interventions (Kagiticibasi, Sunar, and Bekman 2001; Weikart 1978) to conclude that they represent an ideal to be emulated as far as possible by parents everywhere. Based on that premise, numerous parent education programs have been designed to reorient parents toward playful, egalitarian interaction with their infant. Scheidecker's analysis

of his findings in Menamaty suggests that such interventions may be doomed to failure because they fail to connect with the community's established system of socially distributed childcare. A more culturally compatible approach might be to mobilize the community's preadolescent child minders, building on the experience of the child-to-child strategy deployed in the field of pediatric health (Hawes and Scotchmer 1993; Serpell, Mumba, and Chansa-Kabali 2011). A successful large-scale application of this strategy to early childhood education in Ethiopia was reported by Mundy et al. (2014).

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## Complementarity Is a Valuable Tool for Valuing Children

Contrary to parent-centric models of child development, Scheidecker posits the concept of complementarity: child peers can take substantive roles in developing each other from infancy, and these roles are domain specific and exclusive, complementing rather than supplementing the contributions of adult caregivers. Through an ethnographic case study of the rural community of Menamaty in southern Madagascar, Scheidecker describes an approach to child-rearing whereby adults deliver one set of developmental stimuli and child peers another, socializing children into two distinct but important relational modes. The importance of peer socialization has been long established (see James 2013), but in Menamaty child peers must provide forms of socioemotional stimulation required for cognitive development that, critically, are not provided by adults. While mothers (and other adults and older child/teenage carers) primarily focus on children's bodily needs (feeding, holding), child peers take on the role of providing infants as young as 3 months with stimulation and affection. While adult caregivers socialize children to be calm, respectful, and unobtrusive in the presence of those higher on the age-status hierarchy, child peers teach children to be emotionally expressive and self-assertive in egalitarian relational modes with contemporaries. Scheidecker's analysis makes a useful point that age hierarchies demanding asymmetric modes of interaction constrain the kinds of interactions children can have with adults, meaning that significant aspects of socialization must be provided by peers. Children learn to be submissive from their superiors, but they can learn to be egalitarian only from equals.

Scheidecker is cautious about overgeneralizing complementarity, suggesting that comparable patterns of role division are most likely to appear in societies where many children are present from birth, adult-child relationships are hierarchical, and there are no formal day care or educational facilities. The role divisions

Scheidecker identifies in Menamaty are stark and indeed may be produced only under such specified conditions. I suggest, however, that the concept of complementarity has enough flexibility to be useful to think with when theorizing children's socialization and development across a range of contexts, including amid the peculiarly intensive parenting of the hegemonic cultural West. As Scheidecker notes, child development fields typically rely on a hierarchical-sequential model based on Western middle-class families, where children's peer contributions come later in a child's life, are highly mediated by adults, and are seen as secondary to the primary influences of adult caregivers. But in societies, institutions, and organizations dominated by Western social constructions of parents as providers and children passive recipients of care, education, and socialization, children's contributions, from their labor to their medical care and skills, are often underestimated, devalued, or erased. Certainly, during the COVID-19 pandemic many parents realized just how much of their children's socialization and social development are outsourced to their peers and friends. By thinking of children's contributions to each others' development as complementary and necessary rather than supplementary and nice to have, the concept of complementarity invites us to think of children as offering a distinct curriculum—one that may have been overlooked in an adult-centric society that assumes that the only valuable inputs come from adult caregivers.

When we ask, then, what the children's curriculum in a given society entails, we may identify areas not only where children are active participants in socializing themselves and others but also where children are exclusive or primary deliverers of specific forms of socialization. And precisely because these forms of socialization are delivered by children, they are likely to be overlooked or diminished. Moreover, in societies characterized by hyperparenting and intensive adult mediation of children's environments, the forms of socialization that are left to peers may be hidden or shadowed. When adults attempt to control all matters of children's development that concern them, what is left to children are the illicit, the taboo, and the things that concern only children. I am thinking of, for example, the critical role of peers in coproducing children's sexual knowledge and behaviors. Such socialization is often ignored by parents or teachers because of social sanctions that make it taboo (or illegal) to speak of sexual matters with children, even though sexual exploration is a normal part of child development from a very young age. In schools, very young children will also socialize each other in prosocial matters of bodily discipline such as hygiene or presentation that teachers would prefer not to engage with or that are considered out of scope of the teachers' role (I remember, as an 8-year-old, a classmate tidying my hair and removing my headband because "blue and green don't match." I took these messages, which no adult had given me, very seriously). Furthermore, adult power and status may make some forms of corrective socializing more appropriate for child peers to administer. In my fieldwork in schools I have observed teachers ignore or tolerate antisocial (but not prohibited) behavior from children to avoid "punching down" or unnecessarily

shaming, instead leaving peers to do the work of socializing against behaviors that are annoying or socially inappropriate. Scheidecker has helpfully demonstrated how extremely exclusive, substantive, and primordial children's roles in child development can be, but if children's domains of socialization are overlooked, diminished, or taboo, then perhaps even in the middle-class West they are not as secondary as the child development literature imagines either.

Scheidecker gestures toward generational role division as a potential ground for cultural change; if children are learning two modes of relationship, then why not two cultures (this is especially pronounced for migrant children who very apparently learn a different cultural mode from their peers than from their parents)? The children's curriculum may, of course, be not only distinct from the adults' but also countercultural, illicit, or misaligned with the socialization that adults wish children to acquire. We may then consider whether role division can still be considered "complementary" when the children's curriculum is actually oppositional to that of adults. But the complementarity concept is valuable for how it asks us to think about what children do for each other that adults do not. For researchers sick of asking implementation scientists to stop ignoring children, complementarity is a valuable tool for valuing children.

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Bowlby (1969), who proposed attachment theory, inherited agendas raised by psychoanalysts and actively incorporated the findings of ethology and cognitive science that were emerging at that time. The rise of attachment theory was boosted because the folk concept of attachment was already well known in the Western world. Rousseau envisioned people in their natural state, as "natural men," with little inequality and no conflict, and he even discussed the "the nature of human childrearing" (Rousseau 1783 [1762], 1992 [1755]).

Early researchers believed that the characteristics of "natural men" and "the nature of human childrearing" are linked to the hunter-gatherer lifestyle, so they focused on contemporary hunter-gatherers, especially the Ju|'hoan, a group of San who led a nomadic lifestyle in the semiarid lands of southern Africa. Compared to Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) societies, Ju|'hoan child-rearing practices were distinctive, featuring a close mother-child bond, frequent breastfeeding, and late weaning. Consequently, children were thought to form strong attachments to their mothers (e.g., Draper 1976; Konner 1976a). These studies, which we can call the "first wave" of research on hunter-gatherer child-rearing, seemed to embody the educational philosophy originated by Rousseau, namely, the view of education that brings out children's spontaneous learning in a loving, natural, and homey environment.

However, it has become clear that there is considerable diversity in child-rearing in hunter-gatherer societies. For example, among the Aka living in the rainforests of Central Africa, infants were cared for by those who remained in the camp when their mothers were busy net hunting. Nonmaternal breastfeeding was also observed (Hewlett 1991). Infants exhibited attachment behaviors to several caregivers, including mothers (Meehan and Hawks 2013). Such studies, which we can call the "second wave" of research on hunter-gatherer child-rearing, showed that the presence of multiple caregivers does not necessarily prevent the formation of attachment to the primary caregiver and that appropriate attachment patterns cannot be reduced to a single form (Morelli et al. 2017).

Scheidecker's article "Parents, Caregivers, and Peers" is also written in the context of these studies. Interestingly, although the data were collected from pastoralists rather than hunter-gatherers, they exhibit several important similarities with the earlier Ju|'hoan data. For example, breastfeeding is exclusively done by the mother. Infants have much more contact with their mothers than with other caregivers. However, Scheidecker's interpretation of the data is significantly different from the first- and second-wave studies. Two points are particularly important in his argument: (1) the importance of complementary relationships among various caregivers including peers and (2) the distinction between hierarchical and egalitarian relationships. As follows, I basically agree with his arguments on both points.

Attachment theory was developed by using the experimental "strange situation" paradigm (e.g., Ainsworth et al. 1978). Because the experiments were conducted in a controlled lab setting, however, it was difficult to capture the diversity and flexibility of everyday socialization situations. Scheidecker's argument on complementarity sheds light on cultural context that has been overlooked because of this pitfall and facilitates reconsideration of the results of earlier studies. For example, among the San, only the mother breastfeeds, and physical contact between mother and child is very high in early childhood. This tendency is often observed not only in San groups that lead a nomadic life but also in present-day San groups that have become sedentary and concentrated. However, even in these San groups, which at first glance conform to the classic attachment model, other caregivers make considerable contributions early on, depending on the type of caregiving behavior (e.g., physical play, verbal utterances; Takada 2014; also see below).

The hierarchical/egalitarian relationships remind me of the avoidance/joking relationships that have been core categories in kinship studies. The avoidance relationship requires behavior in accordance with norms, while the joking relationship is less subject to such constraints. Although there are radical criticisms of the arguments based on these categories (e.g., Schneider 1984), the depth of accumulated data should be respected. Focusing on everyday interactions, Scheidecker's study encourages us to discuss how relationships are constructed in the process of socialization and makes an important contribution to new kinship studies (e.g., Strathern 2005) that have recently gained momentum in overcoming the above criticisms.

To further develop the above insights and go beyond the first- and second-wave discussions, we need to reconsider attachment relationships as a more dynamic and multiperson system with intimate responsiveness as its axis, rather than seeking definitive answers to long-argued debates, such as how many types of attachment relationships there are and whether there is (or should be) only one primary caregiver. I myself have been promoting research in this direction based on ethnographic data. For example, among the San groups, various caregivers frequently hold infants in a standing position or move them up and down from early on. This “gymnastic behavior” is characterized by intimate responsiveness. When the mother is not breastfeeding, other caregivers often engage the infant in gymnastic behavior. This not only has a significant impact on the infant’s physical organization and sensory-motor development but also contributes to the infant’s development of attachment relationships with others (Takada 2021).

According to Negayama, who has promoted the study of behavioral development among primates, including humans, there is always a “centripetal” attraction and a “centrifugal” separation between individuals in all relationships, not just mother-child relationships. However, attachment theory has idealized an unbalanced mother-child relationship in which only centripetal forces are emphasized (Negayama 2021). There are situations and periods in the mother-child relationship when centrifugality is strengthened. This provides an opportunity for the child to form centripetal relationships with people other than the mother. Gymnastic behavior practiced in San groups takes advantage of such opportunities.

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### Complementary Contexts for Child Socialization

Dr. Scheidecker presents new ethnographic data and perspectives on children’s socialization in Menamaty Bara pastoralists, in southern rural Madagascar. He recognizes the importance of nonparental caregivers, multiple caretaking, and socially distributed care of children and then develops the concept of complementary roles. By complementary, Scheidecker distinguishes between caretaking contexts such as direct provision of food or other caregiving and the broader socialization community for children—broader than only “caregivers.” He shows the value of expanding our understanding of socialization to a wider range of children’s social partners, not limiting this to “only those who assume the particular role of caretaking toward the child.” Scheidecker points out that caretakers and noncaretakers, both important for a child’s development, are mutually supplementing each other and in Menamaty are not in a hierarchy where “parenting” is a priori most important. He also questions the assumption that parents (biological or other caretakers)

necessarily establish or enable subsequent peer relationships (such as through providing a “secure base” or internal models for relationships). The paper describes the contexts in which children learn how to regulate their emotions, emphasizing calmness and deference in the presence of caretakers and other adults, while at the same time being active, voluble, and expressive with peers. Scheidecker integrates mixed methods, including ethnographic participation, qualitative interviews, systematic quantitative observations including spot observations, and other contextual data to support his argument.

As Scheidecker points out, children’s learning is not occurring in didactic, verbally mediated adult/parent contexts generally or through “teaching” specifically (Lancy 2014; Lancy, Bock, and Gaskins 2010). (And formal schooling was only recently introduced.) This leads to the question of whether different prepared learning mechanisms are active in complementary socialization systems such as Scheidecker describes. An extension of the complementary socialization model could attempt to match the 20 or so modes of learning outlined by Konner (2010:720) to these different socialization contexts. Konner describes infants and children as active “culture acquisition devices,” prepared by evolution to discover what the world is like—what is safe, dangerous, patterned, interesting—and to help orient children into essential social groups in their community. He proposes four broad categories of evolved learning, attentional, and emotional/motivational mechanisms in children: reactive processes in the cultural surround (such as classical conditioning, or social facilitation due to reduced inhibition, or instrumental or intentional conditioning), social learning (such as scaffolding, mimicry, imitation, direct instruction), emotional/affective learning processes (the attachment sensitive period, along with positive or negative identification, emotional management and learning through rituals and scripts), and symbolic processes (cognitive modeling, schema learning, narrative and thematic meaning systems). It seems plausible that the complementary socialization contexts in the cultural learning environments described in this paper likely recruit some mechanisms more so with caretakers (mothers, fathers, and others) and other mechanisms with peers, with different implications for children’s learning and development.

The children growing up in this complementary socialization context, when they in turn have children, apparently reproduce the more hierarchical, distanced caretaking practices they experienced when they grew up. The incentives and social structural system for young adults who then become parents seem to override the more fluid and egalitarian peer and non-caretaker socialization modes of childhood (e.g., “built on individual preferences, reciprocal support, emotional intimacy, and mutual affection”). In contrast, the evidence from multiple caretaking and socially distributed care research suggests that boys and girls mostly will reproduce that same plurality of socialization experiences, including multiple caregiving skills, when they become parents (Weisner 1987), but this does not seem to be happening among Menamaty parents. How the children described in this paper revert to hierarchical parental/

caregiving roles will be a valuable further extension of Scheidecker's work. The observational data do show the two patterns (hierarchy and egalitarian) Scheidecker contrasts but also suggest within-category variation. Surely there are individual differences in maternal and paternal behavior, as well as variation in children's socioemotional development, temperament, and gender differences within and between both complementary socialization contexts. How much variation is there within the two complementary socialization categories?

The Menamaty household and family structure accounts for some of the importance of complementary relationship and learning contexts. Children are not necessarily together with both parents in a household where they eat and sleep together. This certainly does not seem to be a stable nuclear/conjugal or other type of family/household system. Among the practices of this community, for example, Scheidecker points out that "children were not strictly associated with any single household: while usually eating with their parents, they often slept together in one of the vacant houses" and "if the parents were divorced, mothers usually returned to their native village and left the child with the father or, if the father was deceased, with his relatives. As a consequence, 22% of children aged 5–8 years and 38% of 9- to 13-year-olds lived without their mothers in the village of Ranomadio."

This pattern of significant residential (and socioemotional) absence of mothers and/or fathers also occurs among families separated by forced migration, economic migration, war, environmental dislocation, divorce, and other disruptions to families and households around the world, which leads to practices sometimes described as both serious dislocations for children and more adaptive "parenting from afar" (de Guzman, Brown, and Edwards 2018). The nuclear/conjugal family and household may never have been the most common form around the world (Therborn 2009), and it well may not be at present either. At the same time, other systems (joint/extended households, single-parent households, grandparental care, fostering and other adoptive practices, etc.) may be more stable and predictable for children than the Menamaty pattern Scheidecker describes. The fluidity and changing household and caretaking contexts children experience in this setting must contribute to some uncertainty for children about the reliability and predictability of care and perhaps may lead to some troubling consequences for some children.

Scheidecker not only has made an excellent contribution to our understanding of socialization in this community but also wants to "alert policy makers and practitioners in the applied field of global early childhood development to the problems of assessing children's developmental risks solely on the basis of what caregivers do." Giving greater attention to ecocultural context and local values and socialization practices is very important to the improvement in conceptualization, design, implementation, and evaluation of intervention programs. This point along with the other evidence and conceptual framework of this paper are valuable contributions to better un-

derstand the profound importance of the ecocultural context in child development.

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## Reply

When reading the comments I was at first surprised that they mostly express consent with my arguments. After all, the target article aims to challenge what is arguably one of the most fundamental, persistent, and far-reaching convictions in developmental sciences: that parents everywhere are the principal social agents in young children's lives and development. Now, after some reflection, the reason appears obvious: all commentators are associated with anthropology, cultural psychology, or neighboring disciplines.

In her commentary, Chaudhary points to the fact that the real dissent is located between these context-sensitive disciplines on the one hand and mainstream developmental sciences as well as early intervention on the other. Findings from anthropology and cultural psychology about the diversity of family life and child-rearing often do not even cross these disciplinary boundaries. If they still do, they often get fenced in textboxes of textbooks, as Chaudhary goes on to explain. Given this crucial observation, an important goal for all of us could be to communicate our findings more effectively to mainstream developmental sciences (see Scheidecker et al. 2023). The target article is unlikely to achieve this goal, because it is published in an anthropological journal that is not necessarily consulted by developmental psychologists or pediatricians. My hope is, however, that the concept of complementary role division provides an effective tool to point out the systematic shortcomings of a parent-centric approach to socialization and development.

The comments raise a number of important questions and offer many valuable suggestions on how to improve and expand the concept of complementarity. For brevity, I address only those points that need further clarification or that I am able to develop further. These points refer to four themes: (a) the specificity of the concept of complementarity, (b) its generalizability, (c) its developmental preconditions and consequences, and (d) its implications for early childhood interventions.

*Specificity of the concept.* All commentators, but especially Lancy, Ng'asike, and Takada, point to research findings from around the world that converge with my observations and arguments. Drawing on his expertise about hunter-gatherers, Takada confirms the importance of complementarity in these societies as well as the distinction between hierarchical and egalitarian relationships. Ng'asike compares my findings specifically with other pastoralist societies and finds many similarities. Lancy shows that the ethnographic record on rural communities supports in particular my observations concerning the large number of caregivers available to children, the focus of mothers on the

physical well-being of children, the respectful distance between toddlers and parents, and the crucial role of child caregivers. This converging evidence strongly supports my main argument about the complementary role division in the social world of children. It could also indicate that my argument is not that new. This gives me opportunity to clarify what is new and specific about the notion of complementarity.

Most of the existing research about distributed care sticks implicitly to a hierarchical model of children's social world or fails to undermine it explicitly. As Lancy refers to research about the Efe in Central Africa, I take this research as an example. Tronick and colleagues (1987) demonstrated that infants among the Efe are frequently passed from caregiver to caregiver. While these findings are certainly important, they do not effectively undermine the hierarchical model of children's social partners. They look at how the same task—holding the child—is distributed among caregivers, who are taking turns in a consecutive manner. Since the same task is hardly ever evenly distributed among all caregivers, there must be someone who holds the child most often. In fact, among the Efe, 4-month-old children have been found to spend 40% of the time with mothers. This is little compared to what would be found in most nuclear family settings, yet it is considerably more than for any other single individual among the Efe. Thus, there is still a hierarchy among caregivers in terms of significance for the child, although the number of caregivers is much larger and the hierarchy among them flatter than in a nuclear family setting.

The notion of complementarity, by contrast, incites us to look for ways children's social partners complement each other by providing different experiences and learning opportunities. At times this may happen simultaneously, for example, when the child is held by an adult while a younger child is available for face-to-face contact. In other words, complementarity implies attending to the specific "job description" of each socialization agent, as Lancy aptly notes, and to the resulting "division of labor" among them.

Even those theoretical approaches or empirical studies that include child caregivers or similar-aged social partners tend to emphasize the importance of older children as socializing agents. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development concept, which Boyette presents as an early complementary approach, in fact suggests a focus on older or more capable children as most significant learning partners. The widely used concept of the "caretaker" also implies looking for socializing agents that are somewhat older or more mature than the target child; otherwise, the notion of taking care would not make much sense. In my understanding, these approaches still adhere to the hierarchical model that I wish to challenge (see also Hay, Caplan, and Nash 2009). Otherwise, there would be no reason to privilege older, more parent-like social partners compared to those who are younger than the focal child.

The notion of complementarity impedes the prioritization of older children as socializing agents and implies the consideration of same-aged and younger social partners as well, especially if there are reasons to expect that they complement the

older ones by providing specific learning opportunities. Children in a group of similar-aged children should interact fairly as much with younger ones as with older ones (depending also on the position within the age range of the group). I see no reason why these children should learn something only when their interaction partner happens to be older. Rather, it can be expected that the younger social partners provide different learning opportunities, for example, for skills like teaching, leading, or providing care to others.

*Generalizability.* Boyette and Spray both raise questions about the generalizability of complementarity and suggest that it may also apply to other relationships or different settings such as "Western" middle-class contexts. Boyette criticizes in that the concept of complementarity "does not offer the robust, integrative theoretical framework we need to explain patterns of diversity and similarity across human childhoods" and makes some interesting suggestions about how it could be developed in that direction. While such an integrative theoretical framework would be certainly desirable, I do not feel confident enough to develop it based on empirical data that are still strongly affected by the Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) sampling bias and, as I would argue, by the hierarchical model of children's social world. Therefore, I introduced complementarity rather as a sensitizing concept or a lens that can be applied in the analysis of any context, help to avoid the potential pitfalls of the hierarchical model, and get a fuller understanding of the complexity and cross-cultural variation of children's social worlds.

Concerning the question of generalizability, it is important to distinguish between the concept of complementarity that includes all possible forms and applies potentially to any social context in which children grow up and the empirical case of Menamaty with a specific pattern of complementarity. This case is characterized by a stark contrast between egalitarian and hierarchical relationships. As I argued in the target article, similar patterns may also emerge in other contexts if particular conditions are present, such as free access to similar-aged children and a strict intergenerational hierarchy. The fact that these conditions were present in most of the rural non-Western communities that have been traditionally studied by anthropologists of childhood may explain the convergences in the ethnographic record mentioned above.

Encouraged by Ng'asike's comparisons to other pastoralist communities, I would expect that the contrast between hierarchical and egalitarian socioemotional registers is particularly pronounced in pastoralist societies. At least in Menamaty the pastoralist activities tend to be highly age segregated, especially for men. The physically demanding task of herding and protecting Zebu cattle is usually conducted by a small group of young men, who may spend days or weeks isolated from the community, collaborating in a close, reciprocal manner. Boys take care of smaller animals in a similar fashion during the day, and even children as young as 4 or 5 tend to roam outside the village together. The fact that these peers are separated most of the time from the elders while taking care of cattle that belongs

to the elders may necessitate a considerable amount of control, which can be achieved through a strict hierarchy. In fact, boys in Menamaty were punished most severely when they lost cattle (Scheidecker 2017). Thus, while this need for control fosters a particular pronounced hierarchy between young and old, the close reciprocal collaboration among similar-aged individuals fosters egalitarian relationships characterized by a very different socioemotional register. This may also be true for other East African pastoralists who are known for their formalized age-set system that emphasizes equality between the similar-aged members of the same set and hierarchy between members of different sets (see, e.g., Foner and Kertzer 1978).

In other societies this contrast may be mitigated through norms that emphasize hierarchy in all relationships or those that promote equality as a general principle. In Western middle-class contexts there appears to be the ideal of equality in all relationships, including those between parents and children. In addition, one could argue that the prominent role of one or two parents in the first years and the almost constant regulating presence of adults in peer contexts promote common standards for all relationships and work against pronounced complementarity among children's social partners. However, as Spray convincingly argues in her comment, in such contexts children may still engage in social relations that are not in line with the adult pedagogy and often take a "countercultural, illicit, or misaligned" form. Spray wonders whether such relationships can still be called complementary because of their oppositional nature. I see them as good examples for complementary role divisions under difficult conditions. They may appear oppositional or misaligned from the perspective of parents or other pedagogues who expect their pedagogy to be all pervasive. For the child, these oppositional social relations may provide unique roles and experiences and thus complement what they can learn, experience, or act out in relationships with teachers or parents.

Finally, Boyette raises the question whether complementarity can be applied to relationships other than parents and peers. In particular he insists that we "should not ignore complementarities between parents or other caretakers." I agree and like to add that we should attend to complementarities wherever they occur. Although I focus on hierarchical and egalitarian relationships in the target article, I also briefly mention complementary role divisions between mothers and fathers in Menamaty. Children experience mothers mainly as proximal caregivers and fathers rather as distal providers and authority figures. This could certainly be further expanded, for example, by looking into specific practices: in the context of physical punishment, one parent—often the father or another male relative—assumed the disciplining role, while the other—often the mother or another female relative—assumed a comforting role, even siding with the child (see Röttger-Rössler et al. 2013). At first this appeared as inconsistent parenting to me, probably because of my German middle-class background. For the parents, however, this was an approved method to teach children fear of elders without estranging them. Furthermore, I hint at comple-

mentarities among similar-aged social partners, most notably between unrelated children, some of whom become archenemies from early on, and related children, some of whom become very close companions. In other societies, other patterns of complementarity have been observed, for example, in Indonesia between parents as comparably strict authority figures and grandparents as comparably indulgent and affectionate caretakers and companions of children (see, e.g., Röttger-Rössler 2014).

*Developmental preconditions and consequences.* Mezzenzana and Keller both point out that most experts on child development would not expect that infants and young toddlers are capable of interacting properly with each other. In fact, as Hay and colleagues explain in their review on early peer relations (Hay, Caplan, and Nash 2018), all major developmental theories predict a later onset of meaningful peer interaction. Let me first respond by pointing to the self-fulfilling nature of this expectation. First, such a view may result from and foster a situation in which infants and young children have little regular contact with peers. Thus, children get few opportunities to develop their capacity for peer interaction in the first years, probably resulting in a developmental delay compared to children of Menamaty and similar contexts. Second, this expectation contributes to the fact that most research on peer relations is conducted with older children, as Mezzenzana observes, and that existing evidence on early peer relations is rarely incorporated into developmental theories, as Hay and colleagues note (Hay, Caplan, and Nash 2018). This evidence points to the fact that meaningful peer relations begin in the first year of life, even in Western middle-class contexts. If Menamaty or similar communities where children have regular peer contact from birth on would have served as a standard context for research, our theories about early relations might look quite different.

Concerning the developmental consequences, my main argument is that complementary role divisions may promote the parallel acquisition of disparate modes—or "modalities" or "registers," as Mezzenzana and Keller suggest—of relating, interacting, and self-expression. In this regard we first need to clarify a point Weisner raised in his commentary. According to him, my article suggests that "the children growing up in this complementary socialization context, when they in turn have children, apparently reproduce the more hierarchical, distanced caretaking practices they experienced when they grew up." He points out that this is inconsistent with other studies indicating that children will reproduce the plurality they experienced throughout the life course (Weisner 1987). In fact, this is also the case in Menamaty: adults continue to experience and express the egalitarian socioemotional modality with other similar-aged adults while reserving the hierarchical register for junior or senior individuals. In the target article I did not express this point clearly because I discussed adults' socioemotional repertoire in regard only to the focal children, not to their many other social partners. I have detailed the persisting consequences of complementary role divisions regarding the emotional repertoire of anger (*seky*), which is clearly subdivided into three clusters (Scheidecker 2020): "retaliatory anger" (egalitarian relationships),

“appealing anger” (hierarchical relationships, toward higher-ranking individuals), and “disciplinary anger” (hierarchical relationships, toward lower-ranking individuals).

The example of the anger repertoire raises the question whether children in Menamaty acquire three instead of just two fundamental socioemotional registers. In fact, what I have called the “hierarchical mode” is realized in quite different, even contrary, ways, depending on whether an individual is involved with a higher- or lower-ranking social partner. In the target article, I somewhat neglected the second option because of my focus on the first 3 years in which children obviously still lack social partners who are decidedly younger. Of course, a more careful differentiation in the group of 0–3-year-old children might have revealed that at times the older children assume a caring role toward infants. However, judging from participant observation, children begin to do that more often once they reach around 5 years and in a regular fashion around the age of 10, when mothers begin to employ them as babysitters. For several reasons I am undecided whether hierarchical relationships toward decidedly lower-ranking individuals should be considered as a third fundamental socioemotional register in Menamaty. On the one hand, children seem to acquire it later and learn it from the interaction with elders by taking their role. On the other hand, the interaction with younger children is certainly a crucial social context for practicing this role in Menamaty. However that may be, it is clear that younger and older social partners complement each other by providing unique learning opportunities as mentioned above.

Finally, Keller raises the important question about the consequences of complementarity for conceptions of the self or person. Although I have not pursued this question systematically, I would like to make some suggestions. As I briefly noted in the target article, cultural psychologists or anthropologists tended to discuss the self in terms of differences between groups, most typically contrasting an individualistic, autonomous, bounded self in the West with a dividual, relational, or unstable self in a non-Western context. Critiques pointed to the problems of such a contrastive approach and suggested that both modalities may be present to some degree in every society or person (see, e.g., Smith 2012). The concept of complementarity allows us to specify how such different modalities may coexist: they are embedded in specific sociorelational contexts, such as hierarchical and egalitarian relationships in the case of Menamaty. They are more than “just” volatile self-expressions, social roles, or identities; they are acquired from early on through daily interaction with specific social partners and thus become affectively grounded, behaviorally effective, and relatively stable. Individuals switch between these modalities depending on their current interaction partners.

*Implications for child-focused interventions.* Chaudhary, Fay, Oppong, and Serpell all reflect in their commentaries on the implication of complementary role division for child-focused interventions in communities of the Global South. They expand my own assertion that a complementary view can

uncover serious flaws in the assessment of early stimulation through mother-child interactions (see also Scheidecker et al. 2021, 2022, 2023) and point to consequences for the design and expectable outcomes of intervention.

Serpell expects that parenting interventions are doomed to failure in contexts like Menamaty because “they fail to connect with the community’s established system of socially distributed childcare.” I agree with this point and wish to elaborate it further concerning the interpretation of intervention effects. Authors of randomized controlled trials, which are considered the gold standard of intervention research, sometimes find that early interventions increase mother-child play or verbal interaction and take this as evidence for the effectiveness of interventions in improving early stimulation and cognitive development (e.g., Weber et al. 2017). However, in view of complementarity this finding could simply indicate a social shift from child-to-child play to mother-child play, not necessarily an overall increase of children’s play. Such a shift might even have harmful consequences, as it is likely to increase the workload of mothers or force them to neglect their other duties that are usually essential for the local economy.

Oppong discusses the implications of complementarity for the question whom to target in early childhood interventions. He suggests that nonparental adults could be reached by mass media campaigns, older siblings through extracurricular activities, and peers through Sunday schools or religious forums. These are important considerations to move away from the current focus on targeting mothers alone. I would like to add that the concept of complementarity might have implications not only for the Who but also for the How. Conventional early interventions focus on changing the behavior of parents or other caregivers according to standards of allegedly best parenting practices. A complementary understanding of children’s social world implies interventions that focus rather on enabling social contacts. To illustrate this point I draw on my current research with Vietnamese immigrant families (see Scheidecker et al. 2020). Practitioners from the youth welfare system often blame the parents of these families that they play and talk too little with their children, and these practitioners launch corresponding behavior change interventions. When considering complementary role divisions, it might turn out that young children’s lack of social interaction resulted from the fact that those who previously served as play partners stayed back in Vietnam and that free access to play partners in the new context is limited. Thus, rather than urging parents, who might be entirely occupied with securing the future, to spend more time playing with their children, organizations and practitioners of parenting support could try to improve the availability of play partners.

Fay points to two other applied fields in which the recognition of complementary role divisions, in particular the specific role of other children, could be important: medical interventions in the context of tuberculosis and HIV in Zambia and child protection in Zanzibar. In both cases, it could be valuable to recognize or reconceptualize what children do for or learn



from other children. Oppong also reflects on the area of child protection and the fact that child-to-child care is often conceptualized and problematized as child labor while its potential for learning is usually overlooked. This gives me opportunity to illustrate once more the specific perspective of complementarity vis-à-vis established concepts like distributed care or multiple caregiving. As mentioned earlier, these concepts imply looking for older social partners who are able to take care of the target child, whereas the concept of complementarity incites looking for younger ones as well, since they might provide specific learning opportunities. Thus, children who are taking care of younger children can be seen as simultaneously practicing a set of crucial social skills they could not easily acquire with older children or adults. If child-to-child care is an important context for learning parenting—and this is actually the case in many societies (Weisner 1987)—then its conceptualization as child labor is mistaken and interventions to prevent it are potentially harmful. They would work against an established system of parenting education.

—Gabriel Scheidecker

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