

Parenting Styles in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

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Doi: 10.23918/ijsses.v10i2p179

Abstract: The quality of parenting that children get throughout childhood and teenage years performs a crucial role in determining their developmental ability and eventually the course of their lives. The parent-child relationship exercises a massive impact on children and influences various of development such as language and communication, mental processes and cognitive abilities, self-restraint, peer relations, academic achievement, and psychological health. This study analyzed the parenting practices portrayed in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. Two aspects of parenting were shown and illustrated through Kambili's father, Eugene, her mother, Beatrice, and her aunt, Aunty Ifeoma. While Eugene exercised strict and oppressive parenting and her mother displayed submission and obedience, Aunty Ifeoma demonstrated a liberal and tolerable parenting style.

Keywords: Parents, Relationship, Children, Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*

1. Introduction

Being a parent might be one of the most unparalleled and exceptional pleasures of life. It may also be an amazing and depressing responsibility. There are only a few roles in the world that are as critical and demanding as those of parents. Parents are not only responsible for the physical welfare of their children, but they are also quite instrumental in molding their personalities, views, individual deeds, and, most importantly, how they consider themselves. Parenting has conventionally always been centered on parents being perceived as authoritative individuals. Children were taught to respect their parents' boundaries and expected to obey them. Their failure to do was met with harsh consequences, most commonly in the manner of a smack or spanking. Rex Forehand and Nicholas Long stress the challenging side of parenting as they observe, "Parenting is one of the most difficult tasks that we, as adults, face. While most of us receive training for our occupations, we enter the world of parenting with little instruction or guidance. As a result, we use mainly trial and error in our attempts to be effective parents" (Forehand & Long, 2010, p. xiii). In a similar fashion, Foster Cline and Jim Fay highlight the gravity and weight of parenting and their difficult mission in bringing up their children as they declare, "Parents who take their parenting job seriously want to raise responsible kids—kids who at any age can confront the important decisions of their lives with maturity and good sense. Good parents learn to do what is best for their children" (Cline & Fay, 2020, p. 10).

Received: January 10, 2023

Accepted: February 26, 2023

Toker, A. (2023). Parenting Styles in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Educational Studies*, 10(2), 179-187.

The family setting is the main environment in which children's physical and cognitive development will either prosper or be hampered. Parents, who are familiar with the typical development of children, are unlikely to mistreat them or be abusive and presumably promote their healthy growth. The quality of parenting received by children is the prominent risk element that prompts the development of behavioral and emotional issues in them. Stright, Gallagher, and Kelley (2008) discovered that children who enjoyed a high-level parenting type throughout babyhood and early childhood achieved higher academic success, better social abilities, and superior interactions with teachers and friends than children who endured low-level parenting. In the same vein, Jackson and Schemes (2005) observed that preschool children who have loving, caring, and less domineering parents who offer an intellectual stimulus, displayed superior intellectual and linguistic competence. Good parenting is a long-term responsibility that induces vital success in the emotional, psychological, and physical development of children. Typically, excellent parenting provides a warm environment in which children can flourish. This kind of climate is essential for forging relationships that improve interaction and cause children and parents to maintain intimacy. Thriving communication demands favorable attitudes, rather than rigid or subjective ones, that encourage children to strive for excellence.

Parenting has frequently been treated by numerous researchers. It has been a popular topic of discussion since the onset of the 20th century. The most notable figure in this field was Diana Baumrind who was a clinical and developmental psychologist by profession and enjoyed popularity due to her research on parenting styles in the 1960s. Baumrind was credited for introducing major parenting styles. Aunola, et al. (2000) published their research on parenting styles and the achievement strategies of adolescents. They attempted to examine the extent to which the achievement strategies of adolescents were closely linked with the parenting styles they encounter in their respective families. Joseph and John (2008) published their article on the impact of parenting styles on child development. They discussed various kinds of parenting styles employed by parents in their homes and tried to explore the impact of these different parenting styles on the physical and social development of children. Finally, Samiullah Sarwar (2016) devoted his research paper to the influence of parenting style on children's behavior. His article investigated distinctive parenting styles intending to find out which parenting style causes children to engage in juvenile delinquency and ultimately renders them, low achievers, at school.

This article attempted to explore the type of parenting style adopted by Eugene Achike, Kambili's father, and Auntie Ifeoma, Kambili's paternal aunt, in Chimamanda Adichie's novel entitled *Purple Hibiscus*. The paper employs document analysis which is a form of qualitative research that follows a systematic procedure to discover documentary evidence and answers specific research questions. Document analysis, like any other method employed in qualitative research, demands that data be analyzed and interpreted as a means to extract meaning, acquire understanding, and formulate empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Glenn A. Bowen asserted the motivation behind the use of document analysis when he observes that "the rationale for document analysis lies in its role in methodological and data triangulation, the immense value of documents in case study research, and its usefulness as a standalone method for specialized forms of qualitative research." (Bowen, 2009, p. 29). The works of Diana Baumrind, a clinical and developmental psychologist on parenting styles will serve as the basis for analysis for this paper since she was considered the person of authority, and her views on the subject were highly regarded and widely accepted. The study tried to answer three research questions namely, what type of parenting style Eugene

possesses, what type of parenting style Auntie Ifeoma possesses, and what kind of impact their respective parenting styles have on the development of their children.

2. Parenting Styles

Parents perform a crucial role in forging and shaping the desirable and assertive behavior of children. In this respect, parenting style acts as a decisive factor in children's development and has a great impact on their psychological and social functioning. Mary V. Joseph and Jilly Jones believe that "Parenting style is largely affected by the influence of one's own parents. Temperament, educational achievement, culture, socioeconomic status and the influence of their spouse affects parenting style as well" (Joseph & John, 2008, p.16). Diana Baumrind identified three major parenting styles in the 1960s: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive/indulgent. Later, Eleanor Maccoby and John Martin added neglectful parenting style. "Authoritative parents are both demanding and responsive. They monitor and impart clear standards for their children's conduct" (Baumrind, 1991, p.62). Parents in this style introduce rules and enforce restrictions by carrying out meaningful discussions, offering advice, and adopting clear reasoning. These parents are friendly, loving, and considerate. They recognize their children's personal autonomy, offer them greater freedom, and foster genuine independence. The second is the authoritarian parenting style. They are "demanding and directive, but not responsive. They are obedience- and status-oriented, and expect their orders to be obeyed without explanation" (p.62). Authoritarian parents exercise strict discipline and frequently turn to rough and severe punishment, like corporal punishment, to keep behavior under control. These parents pay no attention to their child's needs and are usually considerate and supportive. They often rationalize adopting rough treatment to render them tough. The third one is permissive parenting. This style of parents is "more responsive than they are demanding. They are non-traditional and lenient, do not require mature behavior" (p.62). These parents impose quite a few rules and restrictions and show no willingness or enthusiasm to apply rules. Permissive parents are affectionate and lenient who do not wish to say 'no' or dishearten their children. The fourth and final type of parenting style is the neglectful parenting style. "Neglecting or disengaged parents are neither demanding nor responsive. They do not structure and monitor, and are not supportive, but may be actively rejecting or else neglect their childbearing responsibilities altogether" (p.62). Neglectful parents do not introduce strict restrictions or elevated standards. They show no interest or concern for their children's needs and remain indifferent in their lives. These types of parents may possess their own share of mental issues such as depression, physical exploitation, or parental neglect when they were children themselves.

3. Parenting Styles in Adichie's Purple Hibiscus

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a promising and talented young Nigerian author, witnessed military rules like other third-generation of young African literary figures and observed repeated bleak political instability in her country owing to military takeovers. Her debut novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, was published in 2003 and won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 2005 for Best First Book in Africa. Suzan Z. Andrade considers the book "a compelling tale of daughterly love, paternal tyranny, and a girl's complex journey to selfhood amidst political turmoil in Postcolonial Nigeria" (Andrade, 2011, p. 94). Similarly, Cheryl Stobie makes the ensuing remark on Adichie and her novel when she observes, "Adichie clearly reveals the brutality of patriarchal power, and also provides alternatives to the binary extremes of masculine dominance and feminine subordination. The novel is conceived and marketed as global literature" (Stobie,

Gendered Bodies in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, 2012, p. 309). Adichie points out the overwhelming and destructive effects of patriarchal tyranny and intolerance as well as hypocrisy within the Achike family. The parenting styles of Eugene and Beatrice Achike contrast immensely with that of Auntie Ifeoma in the novel. The parental figures in the novel include Eugene Achike and Beatrice Achike, Kambili's and Jaja's parents, and Auntie Ifeoma, their maternal aunt. They are supposed to provide for the safety, care, nurture, supervision, and financial support of their children. No doubt, these parents love their children in their own way and worry about their well-being. However, there is a huge difference in parenting styles that choose to employ.

The first parent figure in the novel is Eugene Achike, the father of Kambili and Jaja. Eugene projects two diverse images in public and at home. He is a prosperous entrepreneur who runs several profitable businesses and owns an English daily newspaper that bravely criticizes the Nigerian government. He makes use of his enormous wealth to provide financial support to his kin and friends, various charitable organizations, and his church. Eugene, simply called Papa by his children, is highly respected and revered in his community. His charitable deeds received recognition when he was presented an award which made Kambili extremely proud and instigated intense feelings in her as she expresses: "I felt myself go warm all over, with pride, with a desire to be associated with Papa" (Adichie, 2012, p. 137). However, Papa displays a strictly authoritarian father figure at home. He is truly restrictive as he imposes strict and unchallengeable rules and sets unrealistically high standards for his wife and children. Papa has little or no tolerance and silence pervades the Adichie home. Everyone is too scared to speak out in case they say something sinful and disappoint Papa by any means. Jaja, Kambili's older brother, displays more apparent defiance against his father, particularly by not attending Sunday communion and inducing a major family scene as a result. Eugene does not permit his children to live their lives as he prepares a strict schedule and expects them to follow it strictly. He does not let them be themselves, spend time with their friends, and allow them to engage in activities or hobbies they will enjoy. With this act of strict authoritarianism, Papa delays his children's initiation into society and prevents them from developing the ability to interact with others due to the fear of receiving corporal punishment. Kambili devotes most of her time to her studies because of her father's pressure to be at the top of her class. She does not mix with other girls and is being mocked as a 'backyard snob' (Adichie, 2012, p. 52). In the view of Heather Hewett, Eugene is "an angry man who has constructed his self-identity around his rejection of his own father and all that he stands for" (Hewett, 2005, p. 80).

Papa is quite abusive towards his wife and children. He punishes them in order to correct their behavior whenever he feels that they have committed sins or failed to do their tasks or duties. Papa employs his own kind of oppression on his family members either he beats and whips them physically and pours boiling water on them. Kambili provides an instance of Papa's physical violence when she and her brother, Jaja, received their share of their father's uncontrollable rage and sense of discipline. She states,

When Jaja and I were younger, from elementary two until about elementary five, he asked us to get the stick ourselves. We always chose whistling pine because the branches were malleable, not as painful as the stiffer branches from the gmelina or the avocado. And Jaja soaked the sticks in cold water because he said that made them less painful when they

landed on your body. The older we got, though, the smaller the branches we brought, until Papa started to go out himself to get the stick (Adichie, 2012, p. 193).

This is Papa's idea of disciplining his children when they failed to meet their father's expectations or neglected their duties and responsibilities. Papa's restrictive and domineering parental control regularly perseveres its stronghold in the conduct and actions of his children. Stobie diverts attention to the symbolic importance of Papa's character and adds that "Eugene is not merely an individual. References to the Big Man in politics [...] and in universities, make it clear that Adichie is using Eugene as a symptomatic case of the unchecked use of patriarchal power" (Stobie, 2010, p.426).

Another form of physical punishment Papa imposes on his children is pouring boiling water on them. He does not spare them this sort of harsh treatment when he discovers that his children failed to follow his instructions. He sees it as an act of disobedience or defiance and rushes to penalize this unacceptable form of conduct. Papa has strained his relationship with his father as he refused to convert to Christianity and adhered to his ancestral beliefs. Papa calls him 'heathen' and bars Papa-Nnukwu from entering his home. He believes his children committed a sin and deserve to receive a fitting punishment. He pours boiling water on her feet as she failed to inform her father of her grandfather's visit to Nsukka. Kambili describes the details of this brutal and harsh punishment.

"Kambili, you are precious." His voice quavered now, like someone speaking at a funeral, choked with emotion. "You should strive for perfection. You should not see sin and walk right into it." He lowered the kettle into the tub, and tilted it toward my feet. He poured the hot water on my feet, slowly, as if he were conducting an experiment and wanted to see what would happen. He was crying now, tears streaming down his face. I saw the moist steam before I saw the water. I watched the water leave the kettle, flowing almost in slow motion in an arc to my feet. The pain of contact was so pure, so scalding, I felt nothing for a second. And then I screamed (Adichie, 2012, p. 194).

These instances of corporeal punishments by Papa adversely affect the psyche and personality of his children. They are not allowed to maintain their own opinions and accept their father's directives without any objections or disapproval. Kambili finds it difficult to reconcile her father's public image with his domineering figure at home.

Papa's violent punishment is not only exclusive to his children. His wife, Beatrice, also endures corporeal punishment from him. In accordance with the details the reader obtains from the novel, Beatrice, addressed as Mama by her children, endures two miscarriages following serious and violent beatings from her husband, Eugene. Kambili provides hints or clues of the merciless act of her father against her mother when she states:

I WAS IN MY ROOM after lunch, reading James chapter five because I would talk about the biblical roots of the anointing of the sick during family time when I heard the sounds. Swift, heavy thuds on my parents' hand-carved bedroom door. I imagined the door had gotten stuck and Papa was trying to open it. If I imagined it hard enough, then it would be true. I sat down, closed my eyes, and started to count. Counting made it seem not that long,

made it seem not that bad. Sometimes it was over before I even got to twenty. I was nineteen when the sounds stopped. I heard the door open. Papa's gait on the stairs sounded heavier, and more awkward, than usual (Adichie, 2012, p. 32).

The children also discover a drop of blood on the floor but failed to link it with the violent beatings Mama received from Papa. They undertake the task of cleaning it as observed in the book: "We cleaned up the trickle of blood, which trailed away as if someone had carried a leaking jar of red watercolor all the way downstairs. Jaja scrubbed while I wiped" (Adichie, 2012, p. 33). Beatrice developed a habit or coping mechanism to deal with the agony or physical pain. She soothes herself by polishing the figurines on the *étagère* to get her mind off the inhuman treatment. It is suggested in the novel that she remains with Eugene partly due to her gratitude toward him for his refusal and resistance to marrying another woman. However, Mama feels she can no longer endure Papa's violence anymore and feels compelled to poison and eventually murder her husband. Thus, Adichie reveals that violence regularly attracts or begets more violence not only as a means of oppression but also as a fight for freedom.

Beatrice, simply called Mama by her children, is another parental figure in the novel. Mama is an unusually quiet, private, maternal figure for most of the novel. She is a loving and attentive woman who loves her children deeply and shows her sincere interest in their well-being. Mama looks after Kambili when she develops severe and frequent episodes of cough and prepares her a herbal drink and "aromatic soup" to ease or make her comfortable. As Kambili observes, "I STAYED in bed and did not have dinner with the family. I developed a cough, and my cheeks burned the back of my hand.... making me ofe nsala... aromatic soup" (Adichie, 2012, p. 15). Mama feels thrilled and exhilarated with the academic achievement of her children, anxiously waits for their arrival, and sings songs of praise when they come home with their report cards. Kambili discloses details of Mama's sense of pride and joy as she remarks, "Mama opened the door even before Kevin stopped the car in the driveway. She always waited by the front door on the last day of school, to sing praise songs in Igbo and hug Jaja and me and caress our report cards in her hands. It was the only time she sang aloud at home" (Adichie, 2012, p. 39). Adichie provides the readers with an affectionate and sincere portrayal of Mama and this gets naturally quite evident in her care and interest in her children's welfare. However, Mama is an extremely passive and submissive woman who does not show any reaction or do or say anything against Papa's violence not only toward her children but also toward herself. Being a loyal member of traditional Igbo society and a strict steadfast observer of local customs, Mama fulfills the role her society expected from her by acting or behaving as a submissive wife and quietly watches as her husband violently beats up her children. In the words of Denkyi-Manieson, Beatrice is "symbolic of our womenfolk who have given up under the yoke of gender segregation, resigned to fate, and have resolved to live in masochism" (Denkyi-Manieson, 2017, p.52). Similarly, Oshindoro highlights her dilemma and predicament and observes that "Mama has always endured his abuses because she is stuck between her love for her children and the culturally-imposed submission to her husband" (Oshindoro, 2019, p. 15).

Mama assumes a different role and stops being meek and obedient when her husband, Papa, begins to threaten the safety and well-being of her children. She can't keep quiet anymore as she is already fed up and believes that it is time to put an end to her husband's tyrannical oppression after Kambili was admitted to a hospital following violent beatings she received from Papa because of the painting they brought home

and she took all the blame to protect her brother, Jaja. Kambili describes her father's fits of violent lashings:

“Get up!” Papa said again. I still did not move. He started to kick me. The metal buckles on his slippers stung like bites from giant mosquitoes... I curled around myself tighter, around the pieces of the painting; they were soft, feathery. They still had the metallic smell of Amaka's paint palette. The stinging was raw now, even more like bites, because the metal landed on open skin on my side, my back, my legs. Kicking. Kicking. Kicking. Perhaps it was a belt now because the metal buckle seemed too heavy. Because I could hear a swoosh in the air...More stings. More slaps. A salty wetness warmed my mouth. I closed my eyes and slipped away into quiet (Adichie, 2012, p.211).

Following this incident and the other one in which she suffered yet another miscarriage upon receiving a severe beating from her husband, Mama decides that poisoning him would be the best course of action to end her suffering. She admits with a calm and slow tone: “I started putting the poison in his tea before I came to Nsukka. Sisi got it for me; her uncle is a powerful witch doctor” (Adichie, 2012, p.290). Mama retreats further into her shell, barely speaks, and assumes an absent-minded and distracted state after her husband's death and the arrest of her son, Jaja.

Aunty Ifeoma is the only character who displays an example of a healthy and ideal parent in the novel. Ifeoma, Papa's sister, is a single and widowed parent who lost her husband and tries to support her three children on a modest salary she receives from her teaching position at the University of Nigeria in Nsukka. She is an independent and self-sufficient woman. She is also a proud woman and refuses to accept her brother's financial assistance although she constantly struggles for money. She provides insight into her modest and ordinary life when she visits her brother's home with her children as she observes: “‘I have brought out my old kerosene stove,’ she continued. It is what we use now; we don't even smell the kerosene in the kitchen anymore. Do you know how much a cooking-gas cylinder costs? It is outrageous!” (Adichie, 2012, p.76). She prefers to stand on her own two feet and refuses to be a burden on other people even if it is her own biological brother. She tries to maintain her pride and dignity while she converses with her sister-in-law, Mama: “Nwunye m, things are tough, but we are not dying yet. I tell you all these things because it is you. With someone else, I would rub Vaseline on my hungry face until it shone” (Adichie, 2012, p.76). Kambili openly expresses her respect and admiration for Aunty Ifeoma and regards her as someone who “walked fast, just like one who knew where she was going and what she was going to do there” (Adichie, 2012, p.71). Her self-reliance and independence are portrayed by her praiseworthy competence to bring up her children and run a house in the absence of her husband. Michael E. Oshindoro, praising traits of her character, contends: “Rather than purely a result of formal education, Ifeoma's wisdom and idiosyncrasies show a mix of both formal and native intelligence, with the latter most highly valued in the novel” (Oshindoro, 2019).

Aunty Ifeoma is not only straightforward and extremely tolerant but also a devoted Christian. Unlike her sibling, Papa, she honors her father's religion and family traditions. She treats her kids with genuine respect and highly encourages them to start asking questions and speaking their own minds. Kambili articulates her admiration for Aunty Ifeoma when she contends

It was what Auntie Ifeoma did to my cousins, I realized then, setting higher and higher jumps for them in the way she talked to them, in what she expected of them. She did it all the time believing they would scale the rod. And they did. It was different for Jaja and me. We did not scale the rod because we believed we could, we scaled it because we were terrified that we couldn't (Adichie, 2012, p.226).

She serves as a source of inspiration for Kambili and Jaja and pushes them to question the methods of their own rearing and nurturing. She helps them discover their own voices and assert their independence. Kambili and Jaja's visit to Nsukka was quite an eye-opening and critical experience as "they become more aware of what is happening not only around them but also in their own family" (Toivanen, 2013, p.107). However, her outspoken and candid attitude cost her dearly as the university dismisses her because of her criticism of the "sole administrator" and has no choice but to relocate to the United States with her family. Attempting a comparison between Beatrice and Ifeoma, Ndula asserts that "all these qualities speak to the way [Ifeoma] parts with the social constructs of her society for her gender" (Ndula, 2017, p.38).

4. Conclusion

Adichie's parental figures in the novel provide valuable insight into the cultural traditions of Igbo society in Nigeria. Papa, Mama, and Auntie Ifeoma are typical examples of parents in this male-dominated and patriarchal society. Adichie's novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, provides a vivid depiction of a mixture of traditional and present-day Igbo cultural values particularly as it is deeply rooted in religion and family life. Through the portrayal of Papa, Adichie attempts to expose the eradication of traditional values in Nigeria. Eugene assumes the role of redefining the traditional Igbo society in Nigeria, substituting the native culture with the colonial practices that conveniently replaced it. He is a perfect representative of the colonizing power, intending to introduce order to his family as he deems necessary. He adopts Western values, converts to the Christian religion, and encourages consumerism. He considers it his mission to impose these same values onto his wife and children. As a person, Eugene fails in many aspects, most importantly failing to display an exemplary parental figure.

Adichie's depiction of Beatrice and Ifeoma, as parental figures, provides her readers the chance to see Mama as a representation of a typical African woman as she personifies a quiet, vulnerable, and dependent and Auntie Ifeoma as a 'liberal' and 'unconventional' woman because of her independence and determination. Mama goes through a 'transformation' from a submissive and obedient wife to a benevolent and self-sacrificing mother when her husband causes her several miscarriages and threatens the well-being and safety of her children through his violent beatings. On the other hand, Ifeoma sets a wonderful example for her children by preserving her dignity and self-respect despite the financial difficulties she encounters and does fail to speak her mind at the cost of losing her job at university. As a parent, she treats her children with respect and highly encourages them to raise their voices freely whenever they deem necessary. She is an exemplary figure of a parent. By presenting Ifeoma as the persona that lends support to Beatrice and pushes her to take charge of her own destiny and those of her children, Adichie reveals a bond of solidarity among African women as they are not merely fictional characters but 'agents of change' or dynamic examples that display hope and optimism for future generations of women to acquire more power gradually in their prolonged journey towards gender equality.

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