

Building on Strengths: Intergenerational Practice with African American Families

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Intergenerational kinship and multigenerational families (three or more generations) have been a source of strength for African Americans. This article presents a culturally responsive intergenerational practice model for working with African American families that draws on this legacy. The model looks at intergenerational kinship and multigenerational families through an Afrocentric, intergenerational solidarity framework. It provides a means to understand and support the strengths and resource richness of intergenerational relationships; the Afrocentric paradigm's affirmation of family and cultural strengths; and the power of intergenerational kinship, family solidarity, and support across generations. Building on the six solidarity elements of the intergenerational solidarity framework, this model provides an empowerment-oriented approach for social work practice with African American families that takes into consideration cultural values and practices.

KEY WORDS: *African American families; Afrocentric; family life cycle; intergenerational; multigenerational families*

Family networks, composed of several generations (three or more), have been a source of strength for African American families. Multigenerations providing support and care for family members and fictive kin (non-blood relatives) across the life course have been well documented (Billingsley, 1992; Billingsley & Morrison-Rodriguez, 1998; Hill, 1971, 1993, 1998, 1999; Martin & Martin, 1985; McAdoo, 1998; Schiele, 1996, 2000). Born out of African traditions and adaptation to a harsh environment, multigenerational families have persevered in the face of disparity and oppression spanning 400 years of slavery, years of "Jim Crow," and decades of segregation, marginalization, and intentional and unintentional racism (Christian, 1995). Despite these obstacles, people of African descent have a legacy of intergenerational kinship, resilience, spirituality, and hope (Bagley & Carroll, 1998; Denby, 1996). Multigenerational families and intergenerational kinships have played a significant role in preserving and strengthening African American families.

As our society ages, multigenerational families will be more common, resulting in longer years of "shared lives" across generations (Bengtson, 2001; Bengtson & Roberts, 1991). It has been predicted that there will be almost equal bands of older adults, middle generation adults, young adults, adolescents, and children as we move deeper into the 21st

century (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). This statistic holds true for African Americans. The numbers of African American elders, age 65 and older, are increasing. Between 1980 and 1995, the number of African Americans increased from 2.1 million to 2.7 million (a 29 percent increase). This group is expected to expand to 6.9 million by 2030 and 8.6 million by 2050 (Miles, 1999). Individuals are now more likely to grow older in four-, or even more, generation families; spend an unprecedented number of years in family roles such as grandparent and great-grandparent; and remain part of a network of intergenerational family ties (Bengtson, 2001; Bengtson, Rosenthal, & Burton, 1990; Hagestad, 1996; Riley, 1987). Kin, and non-kin, will be available to provide care and assistance to younger families (King, 1994; Silverstein, Parrott, & Bengtson, 1995) and caregiving for dependent elders (Bengtson et al., 1990). In view of the changing demographics, it is important to revisit cultural values regarding how families interact across generations.

Historically, cultural values, family practices, and strengths, such as special care for children and elders, kinship ties, and collectivism have been part of African American life (Barnes, 2001). Hill (1971, 1999) wrote eloquently about five strengths of African American families: strong achievement orientation, strong work orientation, flexible family roles, strong

kinship bonds, and strong religious orientation. Hill and others have pointed to strengths that are linked to history, culture, values, and cultural adaptations and suggested that building on these strengths is a good strategy for working with African American families (Freeman & Logan, 2004; Logan, 2001; McAdoo, 1998; McCullough-Chavis & Waites, 2004; Staples, 1999). Strong kinship ties, intergenerational support, faith, and coming together during times of need have been effective resources for African American families.

Today's social environment, and the challenges individuals and families face, warrant use and revitalization of cultural strengths. Problems such as drug and alcohol addiction, overrepresentation of African American children in foster care, HIV and AIDS, health disparities, high rates of incarceration, unemployment, and poverty are severe and complex. Many individuals and families have demonstrated remarkable resilience; others have suffered. Effective strategies to help families as they contend with pressing issues are rooted in African American cultural strengths. Cultural values and practices that sustained families in the past can be used to empower families today. Use of the power of intergenerational kinships and multigenerational family support can serve to preserve and strengthen vulnerable African American families.

Over the past 20 years, a number of practice approaches have been proposed for culturally competent practice with African Americans and other ethnic and racial groups. Strengths-based, empowerment-oriented, ethnically sensitive, constructionist, Afrocentric, and social justice frameworks have been used to guide practice with African American families. Such frameworks provide models by which social problems are assessed and intervention strategies are outlined. Many recognize multigenerational and extended family strengths. However, there is a need for an approach that builds on and restores the strengths of multigenerational families and intergenerational kinship. This approach may include restoring the influence of the extended family's multigenerational network so that relatives and fictive kin are encouraged to remain involved with family members and step forward to provide support and care. An Afrocentric, intergenerational solidarity approach that acknowledges the family life cycle, as well as the values and traditions that have sustained people of African descent, is a mechanism for promoting family closeness and responsibility.

Embracing the legacies and wisdom of past generations and the hope and promise of the future is a framework for best practice. This article describes an intergenerational model that can be used to understand and provide support and assistance to African American families. The model defines families of African descent from an Afrocentric intergenerational perspective. It highlights the history and interconnectedness of African American families and communities and takes into account the temporal nature of the family life cycle.

AN INTERGENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVE: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

An intergenerational perspective is relevant to social work practice with African American families. It brings an awareness of and attention to kinship, intergenerational relationships, and multigenerational families. Strengths, values, and practices that are transmitted across generations, family life cycle stages, intergenerational support, and current cultural context are central to this perspective (Waites, 2008). It provides a framework for understanding the past, exploring the current environment, and using culturally relevant strategies and practices to empower families.

Intergenerational Solidarity

Family relationships across generations are becoming increasingly important. Changes in family age structures are creating longer years of shared lives (Bengtson, 2001). Bengtson stated that "intergenerational bonds are more important than nuclear family ties for well-being and support over the life course" (Bengtson, 2001, p. 7). With increased longevity, parents, grandparents, and other relatives can be available to serve as resources for younger generations. Kin, across several generations, will increasingly be called on to provide essential family functions; intergenerational support and care will increase over time.

Bengtson and his colleagues (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Bengtson & Schrader, 1982) provided a multidimensional construct for understanding intergenerational relationships. Derived from classical social theory, social psychology, and family sociology, their intergenerational solidarity model examines social cohesion between generations. The construct evolved from a longitudinal study consisting of a cross-sectional survey with more than 2,044 participants from three generational families. Data

were collected at three intervals, including the great-grandchild generation. From this research, Bengtson and others (Bengtson & Mangen, 1988; Bengtson & Schrader, 1982; Roberts, Richards, & Bengtson, 1991) constructed an intergenerational solidarity taxonomy for understanding intergenerational relationships. These six elements provide a mechanism for understanding intergenerational relationships and are discussed later in greater detail.

Afrocentric Worldview

An Afrocentric paradigm fits nicely with the intergenerational solidarity framework because it affirms human capacities and family and cultural strengths and promotes intergenerational connections. It presents a worldview that highlights traditional African philosophical assumptions, which emphasize a holistic, interdependent, and spiritual conception of people and their environment (Schiele, 2000).

The Afrocentric paradigm affirms that there are universal cultural strengths and an African worldview that survived the generational devastations caused by the transatlantic slave trade and the oppression that followed. As a result, it is important to understand and respect the customs, practices, and values that are central to African American families and communities. These cultural strengths, as previously described, can be used in micro, meso, and macro interventions to enhance the lives of all people, particular people of color (Schiele, 2000).

Family Life Cycle

Families are at the heart of the intergenerational perspective. Families have shared history and futures (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999); they move through time together. The sharing of history and futures and the moving through time together are often referred to as family life cycle stages. These stages have been identified as leaving home, single young adults, joining of families through marriage, the new couple, families with young children, families with adolescents, launching children and moving on, and families in later life (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999). Relationships with parents, siblings, grandparents, and other family members experience transitions as each group moves along the family life cycle. Multiple family units are formed (for example, families with young children and families in later life), and all are a part of the larger multigenerational family. In this respect, there is a temporal reality associated with multigenerational families, and the family life

cycle provides some descriptive information regarding how families move across time.

The stages described by Carter and McGoldrick (1999) laid a foundation for understanding African American families and family life cycle stages. African cultural traditions, environmental realities, and the diversity of family forms—which evolved from cultural traditions and adaptations to hardships—are also relevant. They provide insights regarding intergenerational relationships and temporal stages. A legacy of strong intergenerational kinship, multigenerational families, and extended family networks is reflected in Hill's (1999) flexible family roles. For example, caregiving is an important value for African American families. Grandparents may step in to assist or raise a grandchild. A single parent may depend on support from parents, or grandparents, after a child is born. African American children raised by grandparents often feel filial obligations to care for parents and grandparents (Ruiz & Carlton-LaNey, 1999). Extended family may play important roles and provide support and care to young and older adult relatives. Multigenerations may live in the same residence and pool their resources. For African American families, the family life cycle stages have significant intergenerational patterns of assistance and care that are reciprocal over time. These intergenerational supports, in some cases, may be in need of validation, nurturing, and revitalization to strengthen and support troubled families (Waites, 2008).

AFROCENTRIC INTERGENERATIONAL PRACTICE

The Afrocentric intergenerational practice model presented here builds on the solidarity construct and the Afrocentric paradigm. It acknowledges the diversity and flexibility of the family life cycle and brings attention to traditions and cultural influences, specifically, caregiving, kinship bonds, the interconnectedness of families, and extended families. It reflects an approach that respects and supports the strengths and resilience of intergenerational kinship. This practice model's basic principles promote a society that values all generations and

- recognizes that each generation has unique strengths—each person, young and older, is a resource
- recognizes the roles of youths, middle generations, and elders in families and communities

- acknowledges conflicts that may occur in intergenerational relationships
- encourages collaboration and support across generations
- fosters intergenerational kinship and interdependence
- fosters public policy that recognizes and addresses the needs of all generations
- supports and nurtures family and cultural strengths.

This model is culturally responsive in that it uses strategies that are compatible with culturally competent practice and transforms knowledge and cultural awareness into interventions that support and sustain healthy family functioning (McPhatter, 1997; Waites, Macgowan, Pennell, Carlton-LaNey, & Weil, 2004).

Afrocentric Intergenerational Solidarity Model

The Afrocentric intergenerational solidarity model consists of six solidarity elements and provides indicators of intergenerational cohesion. The infusion of an Afrocentric worldview provides culturally relevant issues, questions, and empowerment-oriented strategies. The first element, *associational solidarity*, focuses on the type and frequency of contact between generations (see Table 1). Examining the amount and nature of intergenerational contact is at the forefront. Within an Afrocentric worldview, assessing family traditions and history regarding communication is important. Once information is obtained, a process of nurturing, reinforcing, and revitalizing contact and communication among family members can be undertaken. Intergenerational communication may go beyond phone calls; traditions such as Sunday dinners, regular family visits, family reunions, special events, and other celebrations are mechanism for connections. Intergenerational communication can lead to strong supportive networks and enhance the amount and quality of intergenerational contact.

The second element, *affectional solidarity*, addresses the expressed closeness, warmth, and trust found in intergenerational kinships. The indicators call for the practitioner to look at emotional ties to family and community, signs of intergenerational conflict, and the overall reciprocity of positive sentiment among family members and across generations. With an Afrocentric view, affiliations with and sentiments toward the extended family, and the African

American community as a whole, must also be explored. The goal is to assess and address the issues of affection, trust, and closeness and to support and nurture relational understanding and reciprocity across generations.

The third element, *consensual solidarity*, looks at agreements of values and beliefs. The indicators call for an assessment of intrafamilial concordance. Assessing the transmission and agreement of Afrocentric values, beliefs, and traditions, as well as the cultural strengths, enhances the cultural relevance of practice. Understanding family members' generational differences and their willingness to build intergenerational respect, dialogue, and collaboration is also important. The model suggests that practitioners encourage the understanding and recognition of cultural strengths. In addition, attempts should be made to support family and extended family as they engage in history reminding, consciousness raising, and intergenerational understanding and respect.

The fourth element, *functional solidarity*, addresses the frequency of intergenerational exchanges of assistance and resources. The indicators direct the assessment of help giving and receiving and how families assist and support each other. The role of collectivism, extended family support, and community support from churches, lodges, fraternal orders, and so forth are also assessed. Mechanisms to support equitable intergenerational care and the use of formal and informal resources are suggested. This may include extended family, fictive kin, church family, intergenerational programs, or other community resources.

Normative solidarity, the fifth element, looks at filial responsibility and obligations. The indicators are family roles and the strength of obligation to those roles. The Afrocentric worldview expands this sense of obligation not only to parents, grandparents, children, and grandchildren, but also to the extended family, fictive kin, and the community as a whole. Intergenerational family and extended family support, and the use of community programs and formal resources, are encouraged.

The sixth and last element, *structural solidarity*, highlights the opportunity for intergenerational interaction as it relates to residential propinquity. For example, some older adults reside with their children or grandchildren in coresidential situations or in the same community. This arrangement affords them great intergenerational access. Some families, however, may move far away and relocate

Table 1: Intergenerational Solidarity with an Afrocentric Worldview

Construct - Element	Definition	Indicators	Culturally Relevant Issues
Associational solidarity	Frequency and patterns of interaction in various types of activities in which family members engage	• Frequency of intergenerational interaction (that is, face-to-face, telephone, mail) • Types of common activities shared (that is, recreation, special occasion, and so forth)	• Family history, traditions, and practices regarding family communication patterns, and family gatherings and activities
Affectional solidarity	Type and degree of positive sentiments about family members, and the degree of reciprocity of these sentiments	• Ratings of affection, warmth, closeness, understanding, trust, and respect for family members • Ratings of perceived reciprocity in positive sentiments among family members	• Intergenerational family members' access to one another (that is, transportation, telephone, computer literacy) • Preeminence of close parent-child relationship, grandparent relationships, extended family relationships, and so forth
Consensual solidarity	Degree of agreement on values, attitudes, and beliefs among family members	• Intrafamilial concordance among individual measures of specific values, attitudes, and beliefs • Ratings of perceived similarity with other family members in values, attitudes, and beliefs	• Connections with Afrocentric values and practices (that is, respect for elders, special care for children and elders, kinship ties, spirituality, collectivism, and so forth) • Generational values, similarities, and differences
Functional solidarity	Degree of helping and exchanges of resources—giving and receiving support across generations	• Frequency of intergenerational exchanges of assistance (for example, financial, physical, emotional) • Ratings of reciprocity in the intergenerational exchange of resources	• Supportive behaviors and traditions (that is, role of children, parents, grandparents, extended family, the church, lodges and fraternal orders, and so forth in providing support and care)
Normative solidarity	Strength of commitment to performance of familial roles and familial obligations	• Ratings of importance of family and intergenerational roles • Ratings of strength of filial obligations	• Afrocentric holistic, collectivist orientation • Filial beliefs and responsibilities (that is, intergenerational support for at-risk youths, young families, and dependent elders) • Availability of aunts, uncles, children, extended family, church family, and other supports
Structural solidarity	Opportunity structure for intergenerational relationships reflected in number, type, and geographic proximity of family member	• Residential propinquity of family members • Number of family members • Health of family members	• Location of family and extended family members • Migration history • Transportation and travel distances and resources

Source: Bengtson, V. L., & Roberts, R. E. L. (1991). Intergenerational solidarity in aging families: An example of formal theory construction. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 53, 856-870.

due to employment opportunities elsewhere. Older adults may be unable to travel to family or community events due to distant locations, health issues, or limited access to convenient and affordable transportation. Both latter situations affect opportunities to maintain close contact. The empirical indicators focus on the residential proximity of family members, the number of family members, and health and disability issues. Afrocentric worldviews expand this element so that migration patterns, transportation issues, and travel distances are included. The empowerment strategy focuses on helping families rethink how to address structural proximity barriers. This could take the form of family members organizing and sharing transportation resources or establishing a family "home place" or location where family members can gather for respite, celebrations, and support.

Using This Model

This model is not complicated and can be used in harmony with other empowerment-oriented approaches. A culturally appropriate assessment of intergenerational issues and resources is conducted. Practitioners are directed to explore each of the intergenerational solidarity elements with family members using the practice strategies outlined in Table 2.

Associational solidarity is explored by asking family members questions about their family traditions and how they communicate and keep in touch with each other. Family solidarity is enhanced when there are traditions, activities, and history that serve to keep family members connected—for example, Sunday dinners at a relative's home, regular phone calls, church or religious service attendance, family reunions, birthday celebrations, or Christmas or other holiday activities. The practitioner can work with family members to use a variety of practice strategies (outlined in Table 2) to help family members improve their associational solidarity. This might include encouraging family members to plan and or participate in family events. Participation in family events can lead to more cross-generational communication and contact.

Affectional solidarity questions are posed to family members by first exploring whom they feel particularly close to and why. Helping family members understand their traditions regarding family roles and relationships and how they influence affectional solidarity is an important practice

strategy. Affectional solidarity can be nurtured by encouraging a sense of intergenerational kinship—that is, affection for family and extended family members. It encompasses cultivation of intergenerational relationships. The practitioner role is to aid family members in identifying and developing closer ties.

Consensual solidarity is also important and can be explored by discussing family values and by affirming a shared vision for family life. Exploring family members' perceptions and generation differences and similarities provides information regarding family solidarity. Gauging the family's sense of cultural pride and their African American identity is also pertinent. Cultural pride can serve as a unifying force for family solidarity. History reminding to facilitate appreciation of family cultural strengths is appropriate as a practice strategy and might include providing information about cultural history, supporting family opportunities to share thoughts and information about cultural values and beliefs, and engaging family members in activities that will enhance cultural pride. Communities often have Kwanzaa celebrations, concerts, and religious-related programs; watch movies and videos; read books; or engage in culturally inspired storytelling activities. These resources can serve as activities and information that connect the generations and facilitate consensual solidarity.

Functional solidarity is assessed by identification of the "go-to" family members when someone needs assistance. It is also important to identify family roles and resources and how support and care are exchanged across the family and the generations. The practice strategy is to create or restore the family helping network and involves helping family members to embrace shared responsibility and intergenerational support and care for all family members.

Normative solidarity is assessed by exploring expectations regarding family roles. It is also crucial to discuss what happens when someone is not able to perform the designated role. What are the family norms for who should step in? The practice strategy is to affirm, strengthen, and formalize the family members' commitment to one another. This may take the form of encouraging the development of multigenerational networks where children, parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles all play a role in supporting and caring for family members. Because this responsibility can be demanding, connecting

Table 2: Afrocentric Intergenerational Solidarity Model—Questions and Practice Strategies

Associational Solidarity Questions

- Tell me about your family's traditions (holiday celebrations, Sunday dinners, family reunions, special events, and so forth).
- How do you participate?
- How does your family keep in touch? How do you keep in touch?

Affectional Solidarity Questions

- Tell me about the family members you feel close to.
- What makes you feel particularly close to this person?
- Tell me about your extended family and others who are like family. Do you feel close to them?
- Are there certain relationships or duties that you must honor and respect?

Consensual Solidarity Questions

- Tell me about your family's history—your grandparents, great grandparents, and so forth.
- What were/are important values, beliefs, and traditions in your family?
- Do you and family members have similar values and beliefs regarding __ (sex, religion, education, drugs, etc.)?
- Do you feel a connection and pride with the African American community? What type of cultural activities do you and your family participate in?

Functional Solidarity Questions

- How does your family respond when one of its members needs assistance?
- Who are the family members with resources (good, steady job; a home; savings; and so forth) in your family? Are they obligated to help out others in the family? Is there an exchange of resources?
- Do older family members feel obligated to help out younger family members, and is this help reciprocal?

Normative Solidarity Questions

- What roles do parents, grandparents, children, adult daughters and sons, aunts, uncles, and so forth play in your family?
- In your family, what happens when someone is not able to function in his or her role as parent, son, daughter, caregiver, and so forth?

Structural Solidarity Questions

- Where do your family members live?
- What led them to move to ____? Do you visit?
- How do family members travel when they visit one another? Are there any barriers to visiting?
- Does your family have a "home place," a residence where family members gather for special occasions?

Practice Strategies

- Encourage cross-generation communication, and contact.
- Help family consider methods to communicate and to support each other.
- Encourage family members to participate in family events (family reunions, and so forth) and efforts to remain connected.

Practice Strategies

- Nurture relationship building, intergenerational kinship, and equitable care.
- Encourage supportive family and extended family closeness.

Practice Strategies

- Engage family in history reminding to facilitate an understanding of cultural and family strengths.
- Facilitate healing by engaging family in activities that will enhance cultural pride and self-esteem.
- Encourage intergenerational respect and help family members acknowledge their shared visions.
- Help family recognize intergenerational resources and strengths.

Practice Strategies

- Support flexible family roles and intergenerational kinship.
- Encourage reciprocal intergenerational support and care.
- Assist family in using informal (extended family, church or faith based, and so forth) and formal support systems and recourses.

Practice Strategies

- Encourage and support caregiving and other family commitments.
- Develop multigenerational family support programs for grandparents, and other kin, raising children and for children caring for dependent elders.
- Encourage the development of an extended family support systems.

Practice Strategies

- Help family overcome travel- and visiting-related barriers.
- Help family members identify a plan for staying connected.
- Develop community intergenerational programs.

families with community resources such as family support programs, support groups for caregivers, and other programs that serve to strengthen families and extended family helping is crucial.

Structural solidarity is explored by assessing family proximity. Some families use the home of a family member to gather for celebrations or other rituals: It is their home place. Other families do not have a

central location, and some family members may live great distances from the family core of the home place. The role of the practitioner is to help family members explore proximity issues and overcome barriers to traveling and visiting with relatives. This help might include pooling of resources so that all family members can attend the family reunions, church or religious services, and health and wellness

care. Providing assistance to families in the use of strategies to support involvement in family and extended family activities could help family members to visit and stay connected.

Use of this model involves the exploration of all solidarity elements. Family members and families may show strengths in a specific area. If not, the practitioner can then use one or all of the strategies suggested in the Practice Strategy sections of Table 2. To follow are three vignettes that present contemporary family issues and suggested strategies.

Vignette One. Denise is a 32-year-old African American single, divorced mother who is trying to cope with caregiving for both her son and her grandmother. Denise's nine-year-old son, David, has been referred to the school social worker due to excessive absences from school. Her 69-year-old grandmother had a stroke, six months ago, and is now residing with Denise and her son David and her 14-year-old daughter. Denise is distraught because her maternal grandmother was "the strong one in the family." All solidarity elements must be assessed. However, there is a pressing need for support and assistance for Denise and her family. This calls for focusing first on normative and functional solidarity. The worker can help Denise examine her current caregiving roles. It is also important for the worker to discuss Denise's decision to care for her grandmother—What is her sense of obligation and commitment to this role? Once Denise has explored her caregiving values, beliefs, the realities of her situation, and her intentions, she and the practitioner can develop a plan. This might include exploring family resources, the availability of other family and extended family members for support and caregiving, and more formal resources.

Vignette Two. Mr. Brown is an 84-year-old African American, retired Navy civilian dock worker. His wife of 47 years died 14 years ago after a battling cancer for four years. His only son died in an accident 22 years ago. Mr. Brown has two granddaughters, ages 30 and 32, and one great-grandson, age 9. They talk on the phone occasionally, but his granddaughters and great-grandson live 2,000 miles away, and he has not been able to visit them. Mr. Brown reports that he is "lonely" and is considering moving into an assisted-living facility. He wants to reconnect with his family before he moves. All the solidarity elements must be assessed. Immediate issues appear to be Mr. Brown's expressed loneliness and his infrequent contact with his granddaughters

and great-grandson. This calls for focusing on associational, affectional, and structural solidarity. The worker can help Mr. Brown make contact with his granddaughters and with other family members, especially those family members who have been supportive in the past. Mechanism to maintain communication should also be explored. This may consist of organizing regular visiting, where transportation is arranged for Mr. Brown. It could also mean arranging regular phone contact, sharing pictures, and sending cards. Mr. Brown may also benefit from more contact with other family, extended family, and friends from church or any groups that he has participated in over his life course (for example, lodges, fraternal orders, church clubs, civic groups). Also, intergenerational programs, if available, may also be a good resource.

Vignette Three. Joan, a 41-year-old African American woman, is incarcerated because of a drug-related charge. She is in the second year of a three-year sentence and is now drug free. She has three sons, ages 19, 12, and 10. The two youngest sons reside with their paternal grandmother. Joan's oldest son has lived with her mother most of his life. Joan has not seen her sons in two years. The younger children's father died in a car accident; he was driving while impaired. Joan is very concerned about her sons and wants to provide a better life for them. She hopes to arrange visitation, and, so far, her younger son's grandmother has been uncooperative. Her 19-year-old son has refused to visit. Although all solidarity elements should be assessed first, this situation points to affectional and consensual solidarity problems. Joan must be aware that her addiction and past behaviors may have caused apprehension and skepticism on the part of her family. As the practitioner helps Joan to make contact with her children, it will be important for him or her to engage the family in forgiveness, relationship building, and reaffirming of a shared vision across generations for the health and well-being of the children and family. The kinship bonds are in need of revitalization.

CONCLUSION

In view of contemporary issues facing families and the significance of multigenerational families, culturally relevant models of practice are called for. African American multigenerational families have a legacy of resilience, spirituality, and hope that has served to fortify vulnerable members. As our society

ages, the number of multigenerational families will increase, and intergenerational cohesion issues will move to the forefront. This demographic shift, and the opportunity for shared lives, can be an asset for families. An empowerment-oriented framework that provides a mechanism to build on cultural strengths, intergenerational kinship, and support processes by which generations can provide mutual assistance and care during times of need is indicated. This model is a good step in that direction. Many aspects of this model have been a part of culturally responsive work with African American families.

The Afrocentric intergenerational sodality model is a strengths-based approach that works to empower multigenerational families and intergenerational relationships. In this regard, there is an assumption that families and extended families have strengths and that some form of intergenerational kinship can be nurtured. A shortcoming of this model is that the full application of each solidarity component has not been systematically tested. I plan to apply this model to practice interventions and intergenerational programming.

The Afrocentric intergenerational practice model shows promise. Building on Bengtson and others' intergenerational solidarity construct, infused with an Afrocentric worldview, this model provides a culturally relevant approach for work with African American multigenerational families. It facilitates an understanding of how intergenerational relationships can be supported and provides multidimensional guidance regarding intergenerational relationships and multigenerational families. The intergenerational model considers generational transmission from a strengths perspective, looking not only at problems, but also at the assets that multiple generations may provide. It is a framework that taps into the power, resilience, and capital from past and current traditions and relationships. The three vignettes provide examples of how this model might be used. To fully examine this model, additional applications should be studied.

Application of the Afrocentric intergenerational practice model, in conjunction with other empowerment-oriented approaches, is a best practice method. Social workers are called on to work with African American and other families. This work is especially relevant for work with vulnerable African American families in need of nurturance and care. As our society ages, it will be increasingly important to understand intergenerational issues and develop

resources that help multigenerational families navigate the complex and changing relationships and problems in our contemporary society. As we move through this century, this model may prove to be very relevant to the changing demographics of our aging society. **SW**

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