STRATEGIES FOR EMPOWERING THE AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILY

by

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The Nineteenth International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences
Seoul, Korea   August 19-26, 1992

Abstract

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The "deficit model" approach is traditionally used when studying the African American family. This approach uses the middle class Caucasian American family as the standard of comparison for evaluating the adequacy, needs, and success potential of the African American family. In this comparative process, the unique strengths and empowerment potential of the African American family are typically ignored. This paper alternatively proposes use of the "difference model" approach for studying the African American family. This approach separately examines rather than compares groups of families that differ structurally, culturally, and/or socioeconomically, recognizing that each group likely differs with regard to some of its needs, strengths, and values. This approach is wholistic in nature; that is, it gives concentrated attention to all classes of African American families, recognizes the different family structures and support networks among these classes of families, and views these families as having separate and collective family empowerment potential. Empirical evidence of the usefulness of this approach for developing research-based interventions to empower the African American family is provided. Some specific strategies for empowering the African American family that are based on the "difference model" approach are discussed. These strategies are culturally relative, include partnership efforts with systems of the larger society, and promote the view among African Americans that empowerment from "black pride" is limited without realizing their economic potential and controlling their own destinies.

Strategies for Empowering the African American Family

Introduction

The strategies for successfully empowering the African American family which are set forth in this paper are anchored in a wholistic view rather than a stereotypic view of family life among African Americans. The common stereotypic view of the African American family is that it is an association of persons of African descent living in America who are related by blood, marriage or adoption, female headed, and poor with children in trouble (Du Bois, 1909). This view is due in part to the failure of scholars, political analysts, and media executives to attend to the varied African American family structures that exist, including those in the middle and higher levels of the socioeconomic continuum. This negligence has resulted in a lack of understanding of the challenges involved in enabling African American families to meet their needs, secure their futures, and control their own destinies.

A wholistic conceptualization of the African American family is inclusive in nature, recognizing the varied structures and economic levels of families that the term "African American family" really represents. It defines the African American family as an association of persons of African descent living in America who are (a) related to each other by any of a variety of means including blood, marriage, formal adoption, informal adoption, or by appropriation, (b) headed by a female, male, or a male and female who equably or inequably share authority, (c) sustained by a history of

common residence; and (d) deeply imbedded in a network of social structures both internal to and external to themselves.

With this wholistic view of the African American family as an anchor, the family empowerment strategies presented in this paper respect and utilize the strengths of the varied families in the African American community as well as the multiple sources of influence that impact their destinies. This "wholistic perspective" is consistent with that of the earliest and best of African American scholarship on the family. W.E.B. Du Bois, the pioneering African American scholar, asserted that it is not possible to understand and impact black life in America without knowledge about the influence of historical, cultural, social, economic, and political forces in the plight of black Americans (Billingsley, 1990)

The strategies for empowering the African American family that are discussed in this paper are derived from a "difference model" approach to studying the African American family rather the traditionally used "deficit model" approach. The "difference model" approach as proposed by Oyemade & Rosser (1980) advocates recognition of cultural, racial, and socioeconomic differences between groups and reframes from the common practice of comparing groups that differ on one or more of these variables. An implication of this approach is that strategies to empower African American families should reflect awareness of the differences in structure and function that exist across these families. The "difference model" approach also suggests that strategies for empowering the African American family cannot be inferred from the results of comparing the African American family and the Caucasian American family.

Indeed, it is common practice to use the middle class two-parent Caucasian American family as the standard of comparison for evaluating the adequacy, needs, strengths, and success potential of the African American family. This "deficit model" approach fails to recognize the unique strengths and empowerment potential of the African American family. As a result, there is a growing consensus among researchers that it is a gross mistake to compare African American families and Caucasian American families given that these two family groups have markedly different histories, operate in different social/cultural milieus, and exist in a society where racism against African Americans is rampant (Lyles & Carter, 1982). Findings from such comparisons and interpretations of them invariably result in negative consequences that impede the empowerment of the African American family (Mathis, 1978; Lyles & Carter, 1982; Collins, 1989; Billingsley, 1990).

Family Empowerment Strategies

The strategies for empowering the African American family set forth in this paper call attention to the varied African American family structures and their potential for empowerment; encourage "difference model" research as well as culturally relative intervention approaches; involve traditional and nontraditional support partnerships within and outside of the African American community; utilize the leadership potential of the African American church; and promote "black pride" and traditional African American family values. The major underlying goals of the strategies include educational advancement, family stability, and economic independence of African

Americans. The history and recent experiences of the African American family suggest that achievement of these goals is pivotal in empowering the African American family.

Strategy I: Execution of "Difference Model" Research to Identify Factors in Successful Family Functioning Among African Americans

In order to empower the African American family it is important to (a) conduct research to identify significant factors in the economic and social success of each subgroup of African American families that differs structurally, culturally, and/or socioeconomically, and (b) utilize this information to develop specific interventions (e.g., counseling approaches, training programs, economic development programs, etc.) to facilitate successful functioning of each of these groups of families. The research being proposed is labeled "difference model" research because it separately examines groups of families that differ structurally, culturally, and/or socioeconomically, recognizing that each group likely differs with regard to its needs, interests, opportunity structures, strengths, and family values. Indeed, what is important for successful family functioning and empowerment of African American families (e.g., lower class versus middle class versus upper class families) will likely differ in content and/or method.

"Difference model" research precludes making assumptions about the family functioning of African Americans as a group on the basis of research with Caucasian Americans, as is common practice. Such assumptions are avoided by analyzing data from these two racial groups in separate statistical models such that predictors of or

factors in the family functioning in each group are separately investigated. Simply entering race as an interaction variable and income as a covariate in statistical models for identifying factors in successful family functioning of different ethnic groups does not control for potentially confounding correlates of income such as opportunity structure. Furthermore, findings from analyses of family functioning data from African Americans can only have reliable implications for other African American families who are similar in family structure, culture (e.g., urban versus rural), and socioeconomic status to the sample of families from whom the data were collected.

"Difference Model" research to examine how the structural changes within the economy and society affect changing familial relations is particularly needed (Whitman, 1983; Smith, 1987). Furthermore, there is a need to investigate the differentiation within the African American community that shows the interests and family functioning priorities of middle class African Americans diverging from those of poor African Americans (Lemann, 1986; Wilson, 1985).

Given the paucity of valid and reliable assessments to measure the psychological, social, or family functioning of African American families, development of such assessments are needed. Leadership in such instrument development must come from African American social scientists. Research positions and grants for such assessment research are needed to enable African Americans to conduct this research.

Difference model research to identify factors in successful functioning of the African American family at the very least should be conducted by researchers trained

in cross cultural communication and informed about the history, culture, and socioeconomic condition of the subgroup of African American families who will be sought to participate in each study. Given the questionable validity and reliability of existing written inventories and scales to evaluate family functioning, behavioral observation data collection is a plausible option or supplement to these written assessments (Wilson, Hinton et al., 1990; Wilson & Tolson, 1990. Optimally, the reliability and validity of instruments used in family functioning research with groups, other than the norming group, should be carefull reviewed, cross validated, and re-normed. Qualitative as well as quantitative family functioning measures also seem indicated, given the diverse types of kinship linkages involved in the varied family structures under the umbrella term "African American family" (Gaudin & Davis, 1985).

Strategy II: Promotion of Culturally Relative or "Nondeficit" Perspectives on African American Culture By Those Involved in the Process of Empowering the African American Family

The host of groups including politicians, business leaders, social workers, church leaders, teachers, and therapists who must be involved in empowering the African American family must use culturally relative approaches in this empowerment process. Development of such approaches requires a culturally relative or "nondeficit" perspective on African American culture that can be acquired through education and training (Dobson, 1983; Cushner, McClelland, & Asfford, 1992). This education and training necessarily must include segments on the value of culture, cultural differences

and similarities, enculturation, and socialization processes. It must also include information about the diverse family structures commonly labeled the African American Family, the historical factors in the plight of African Americans, and the diverse expressive behavior patterns among African Americans.

This culture relative education and training should involve both didactic and experiential teaching methods to develop some general perspectives that are important in any efforts or approaches to empower the African American family. One such perspective is that extended families headed by one or two parents are "normal" with successful empowerment potential. Indeed, the extended family kinship system, which is rooted in West African culture, enabled African Americans to survive slavery and post-slavery oppression (Sudarkasa, 1988). To date, kinship networks continue to be the first resource sought by many African Americans in response to social, political, and economic changes throughout the world which continue to affect African American families (Hall & Tucker, 1985; Hill, 1987). Thus, these kinship networks should be positively viewed and utilized when developing strategies for empowering African American families.

Indeed, the psychologist or social worker who is given the task of determining if an unemployed, recently divorced, African American mother can continue to rear her children should assess the level of available psychological, social, and financial support from blood-related and non-blood kin. The psychologist or social worker in this case may be able to help create or maintain a stable family environment for the children by assessing and and determining the utilization of child care, father-figures,

and other resources often available in African American kinship systems. To support such kinship oriented actions for stabilizing and empowering African American families, modification of policies and laws that preclude actions to support the cultural tradition of the extended family kinship network, such as laws against informal adoption, will need to be modified (Gray & Nybell, 1990).

A second perspective that is important in efforts or approaches to empower the African American family is that African American fathers and father-figures have potential and/or desire to provide psychological, social, and/or financial support for their families (Hines & Boyd-Franklin; 1982). Contrary to stereotypical perspectives, African American fathers have a history of participating in childrearing activities (Belle, 1982). However, unemployment, judicial discrimination against African American males, laws limiting aid to a low income family when the father is living in the home, and other societal forces beyond the direct control of the African American family have and continue to foster absence of fathers and father-figures from African American families. Leaders and groups involved in empowering the African American family must respectfully engage African American fathers in this empowerment process and make this involvement possible by providing jobs and making laws conducive to the presence of fathers in the home regardless of their employment status (Gray & Nybell, 1990).

The need for the presence of African American fathers and/or father figures in the homes of their families was recently evidenced in a "difference model" research study by the present author and a colleague involving 107 low income African

American families (Dunn & Tucker, 1992). This study examined the relationship between father's or father figure's presence or absence in the home and (a) the quality of family support given the children in the family, (b) the children's adaptive functioning (i.e., level of communication, socialization, and daily living skills), and (c) the children's maladaptive behavior (e.g., fighting, defiance). It was found that the children with fathers or father-figures in their homes, as compared to children without fathers or father-figures in their homes, received the highest quality of family support, evidenced the highest adaptive functioning, and the lowest incidence of maladaptive behavior.

A third perspective that is important among individuals and groups involved in empowering the African American family is that the goals of childrearing in the African American family and the physical discipline methods often used to achieve these goals are rationally based and motivated by love rather than reflective of family instability and rage. Allen (1981) compared child-rearing goals of middle class African Americans and middle class Caucasian Americans and found that ambition and obedience were the most important of all goals reported by the African American parents, whereas happiness and honesty were the most important childrearing goals of Caucasian American parents.

It was concluded from these findings that the childrearing goals of African American families reflect the reality of racial discrimination against African Americans that has historically impeded or blocked their success attainment and often forced unjust submissive and obedient behavior to avoid imprisonment or death. The use of

varied discipline methods including physical discipline by African American parents reflects their intense desire to promote values that will increase the likelihood of their children reaching adulthood and of empowering the African American family against many racist anchored odds. Leaders of programs to teach successful parenting and to prevent and/or treat child abuse must show an understanding of and respect for the childrearing goals and practices of African American program participants (Gaudin & Davis, 1985). This understanding and respect will increase receptivity of African American parents to learning new and different parenting approaches that may assist them in achieving their reality-based childrearing goals.

The fourth important perspective for those involved in empowering the African American family is that the diverse language and communication styles of African American families are not reflective of different intelligence quotients or levels of success potential, but rather are the products of the combined influence of West African culture and American culture. Black English, a common term for language used routinely or selectively by many African Americans, evidences characteristics of both Standard English spoken in the American Culture and West African languages spoken by Africans who were removed from their homelands, enslaved and brought forcibly to the New World (Smitherman 1986). African Americans across the socioeconomic spectrum often choose to use Black English with family and friends as it communicates the existence of a pride-elevating common bond -- a culture with history and traditions that reflect African Americans to be descendants of an empowered people.

African Americans who have not had very advanced training in Standard English may be more comfortable and expressive using Black English. Viewing Black English as another cultural language with a rich history and great significance in the lives of African Americans will explode the myth that it is an indication of limited intelligence with limited empowerment potential; consequently, communication across race and socioeconomic levels will become more open and thus conducive to wholistic partnership efforts for empowering African American families. Wholistic partnerships are those that utilize the different resources within and between the various subgroups of African Americans, Caucasian Americans, and others within and outside of America and thus are multicultural and diverse linguistically as is our country and our world.

Strategy III: Utilization of Traditional Family Support Networks Among African Americans to Empower the African American Family

Among African Americans, family support networks have traditionally been very strong and have included not only the extended family of blood-kin and non-related kin but also the African American church (Wilson & Tolsn, 1990). Who participates in these networks and the nature of their participation is a function of family income and structure. Low income African American families, especially those headed by females, are more likely than other income groups to be involved in co-residential sharing in order to live within their income and for child care assistance (Beck & Beck, 1989). Middle class and working class African American families often

contribute financially to extended family support networks, and as a consequence often have reduced consumable income (Wilson & Tolson, 1990).

This norm of families helping families through sharing resources can indeed be used as a foundation for actions to empower the African American family. Three examples of such family help actions will serve to make this point. First, rather than simply giving financial assistance to family members, middle class and upper class African American families can set up small businesses to employ family members who need an income. If family member employees in such businesses are made small stockholders in them, stability of their families will likely be fostered.

Second, leaders in the African American community can provide training for African American families on effective money management, ways to invest the money they have, strategies for saving tax dollars, strategies for financing children's education, buying real estate, and other topics that will enable African American families to become financially stable and to control their future economic state.

Third, African American family members with marketable job skills can teach other family members those skills. Just as quilting and other activities were passed along in the African culture, marketable job skills for economic independence can be passed along among African American families.

Strategy IV: Involvement of the African American Church As A Major Force in Empowering the African American Family

Churches in African American communities have historically played leadership roles in the social support networks of African American families (Bennett, 1990). To date the African American church continues to facilitate family unity, provide for the release of emotional tension, host social and recreational activities, provide children public speaking and other skill development and leadership experiences, and confer personal recognition, social status, and self-esteem ((Staples, 1976; Lyles & Carter, 1982). However, given the pervasive changes in society that severely strain the ability of the family system to respond (Wilson & Tolson, 1990), the church must expand its role in empowering the African American family.

Specifically, there are three aspects of family life that have and continue to change dramatically and that the African American church must address in the family empowerment process: (1) the changing family memberships and compositions in association with increasing divorce rates and rates of imprisonment and death among African American males; (2) the increasing joblessness among African American men, resulting in financial difficulties and associated life stress; (3) the increasing number of female-headed families that are persistently dependent on social welfare programs (McLanahan & Garfinkel, 1989; Teachman & Schollaert, 1989; Tienda & Stier, 1989).

What can the African American church do to address these aspects of African American family life? Several actions are needed and feasible. First, the church can take leadership in providing family services to the varied types of families regardless of

whether these families are members of the respective church. Furthermore, family services need to be provided by professionals and be wide in scope, including family planning, marital and family therapy, budget management, parenting training, a community services resource hotline, and a job finding assistance program.

Second, African American churches and other churches can form partnerships with local colleges and businesses to fund job training programs, literacy programs, continuing education programs, child care centers, and after-school tutoring and recreation centers in the African American communities where they can be easily accessible to African American families. African American churches can also serve as the sites for these programs and services, thus exploding the image of the church as primarily a place for select groups -- Christians and those who want to become Christians. Consequently, the African American church will become more involved in various aspects of the lives of diverse groups of African American families including those not likely to be at traditional religious church services. Such involvement will provide many opportunities for the church to promote and reinforce positive family and human values. When the real life day-to-day problems of African American families are being addressed by churches, these families will in turn support the empowerment of the church for making the world a better place.

Third, the African American church can actively involve itself in the political process as a champion of civil rights and human rights for African Americans and all people. This active involvement, which is consistent with church tradition, should include sponsoring voter registrations and projects to increase voter turnout, and

educating African American families about pending legislation and the views of legislators which may impact the empowerment potential of the African American family.

Fourth, the African American church can expand its political activities to include forming and taking leadership in partnerships with education associations, health care organizations, and human services groups to lobby for laws, policies, and programs that will facilitate family unity, adequate employment opportunities, entrepreneurship, job equity, good health care, quality education, human services for the elderly and disabled, and job re-training opportunities in the African American community and in all communities. Without such multiple partnership efforts, empowerment of low income African American families will not occur, and without this occurrence, the empowerment potential of middle class and lower class African American families is negatively impacted. Indeed, these groups of families are linked by common threads of history and culture that inspire a sharing of resources that are decreased when any one of the groups is limited in its resource contributions and thus its empowerment potential.

Strategy V: Implementation of an Economic Development and Employment Plan at the National Level Designed to Enable African American Families "To Pull Themselves Up By Their Bootstraps"

A look to the recent past clearly indicates that two major determinants of family stability and thus family empowerment among African Americans are employment

status, particularly of fathers, and family income. As late as 1960, when formally

uneducated African American men could still hold good paying blue-collar jobs in the

industrial sector, 78% of all African American families with children were headed by

married couples. However, since 1960 when significant changes in the U.S. economy

began, the percent of married couples heading families with children declined steadily

to 64% by 1970, to 54% by 1975, to 48% by 1980 and to 40 percent by 1985. Also

since 1960, the percent of single-parent families, nine-tenths of which are headed by

females, escalated steadily from 22% of families in 1960 to 33% by 1970, to 44% by

1975, to 49% by 1980, and to 54% by 1989 (Billingsley, 1990; Pluski & Williams, 1989).

The changes in the U.S. economy that facilitated these significant changes

included (1) a shift away from production of goods toward operation of service

producing industries, (2) relocation of basic industry out of the central cities to the

suburbs or overseas, (3) movement of potential African American workers from the

South to northern cities, (4) an increase in the number of immigrants from other

countries willing to work in low paying jobs, and (5) replacement of many blue collar

jobs with white collar jobs. These changes have and continue to seriously hamper the

job seeking efforts of African Americans throughout the nation (Smith, 1986). The

increasing numbers of African Americans who find themselves living in economically

depressed urban areas often cannot successfully compete for the decreasing number

of jobs available because they do not possess the required skills of a growing service

economy. The decrease in blue collar jobs has had a particularly strong negative

impact on African Americans because it is in these jobs that the majority of African Americans have traditionally been employed.

Many African Americans have been either forced into minimum wage jobs or totally out of the job market. The impact of these changes in employment likely include involvement of African American males in the underground economy (Denton 1985) which often eventually lead to more crime and/or imprisonment or homicide. Hopelessness, depression, feelings of inadequacy, physical illness, and an increased death rate due to strokes, heart attacks, and kidney disease (Pluski & Williams, 1989) have all been found to be associated with unemployment of African Americans as well as that of Caucasian Americans. All of these consequences of unemployment and minimum wage jobs undermine the stability of African American families by keeping or forcing them into poverty and/or contributing to father absence from the home.

Traditionally, an important part of an African American father's identity has been the role of bread winner in his family, and an expectation of the African American mother is that her husband financially contribute to the family. Because of the lack of economic power, or of the perceived potential for it, some African American males may be choosing not to take their place in the family, and some African American mothers of their children may be choosing not to marry these males. Society's changing values and morals in the direction of acceptance of having sexual relations and children without marriage, as well as the present welfare system, are supporting these choices.

Almost one-third of the African American population continues to be poor, and the poverty rate of African Americans is three times that of Caucasian Americans. Since 1985, the unemployment rates of African American males and females continue to be close to three times higher than those of Caucasian American males and females, respectively. Families, both African American and Caucasian American, tend to remain stable as income increases. Below $20,000 about 50% of African American families remain intact, whereas below $10,000 slightly under 30% of African American families remain intact (Pluski & Williams, 1989).

Clearly, action at the national level for increased employment and economic development are needed to provide jobs for adults and teens and investment opportunities that will enable African American single parent families and two-parent families to "pull themselves up by their bootstraps". This action needs to include provision of child care programs at job sites, job skill training programs for teens and adults in African American communities, guidelines to ensure nondiscriminatory job hiring practices, employee investment and retirement programs for blue collar as well as white collar jobs, funding options for African Americans to get a college education, grant and loan programs for African Americans to start small family operated businesses and large businesses, and mentor programs for African Americans that will increase their likelihood of having successful businesses.

Additionally, transformation of the welfare program into an education and workfare program is needed to assist African American families, including fathers, in gaining economic independence. Furthermore, a concentrated effort must be made

by scholars working at the national, regional, and local level to develop theories and research-based interventions that will lead to valid social-policy prescriptions (Smith, 1986). The goal must be empowerment of the African American family in particular and the U.S. economy in general.

Strategy VI: Empowerment of African American Children Through "Difference Model" Based Education In Order to Ensure Future Empowerment of the African American Family

The educational history of African American children has been significantly influenced by unequal educational opportunities and institutional racism (Holiday, 1985). Research has tended to indicate that African American children score lower than whites on a number of personality, social, and cognitive variables (Walsh & Betz, 1990). It is also typically reported that children who are members of low socioeconomic families perform significantly less well than their middle and upper class peers (Marjoribanks, 1981). Such "deficit model" research only serves to inaccurately portray African American children as inferior to Caucasian American children -- the standard group by whom all American children are typically judged.

"Difference Model" research, which examines predictors of academic achievement, success attainment, and social success of different groups of African American children who differculturally, structurally, and/or socioeconomically differ, is needed. Such research recognizes that sociocultural background differences, and the family values and learning motivators associated with these background differences,

should be considered in the teaching and learning process. Results of this type of research will provide implications for effectively teaching African American children. The tradition of using the same teaching methods and approaches with all children, and of failing to discuss different cultural views of the subject matter being taught, serves to minimize the participation and interest in academic discussions by African American children who are culturally different and typically in the minority in most classrooms.

Empirical support for "difference model" based education has been provided by the present researcher and her colleagues. In a study involving 266 mostly low income African American children and 414 mostly middle class Caucasian American children, these researchers examined the association of academic achievement (i.e., grade point average) with adaptive functioning (i.e., level of communication, socialization, and daily living skills) and maladaptive behavior (Brady, Tucker, et. al., in press). The data of the two groups of children were analyzed in separate models to determine factors associated with the academic achievement of each group. Results revealed that whereas communication skills, daily living skills, and maladaptive behavior (e.g., fighting) were significantly associated with the grade point averages of the Caucasian American students, only maladaptive behavior was significantly associated with the grade point averages of African American children. It was also found that father presence or absence in the child's home was not significantly associated with the grade point averages of the African American children; however,

among African American children in the study, father presence was significantly associated with higher grade point averages.

These findings provide further support for difference model research and for separately studying the academic achievement of groups that differ socioeconomically and/or culturally. The authors concluded that teaching low income African American children to self-manage anger, to be assertive versus aggressive or passive, and to use conflict resolution skills may be helpful in improving their grade point averages. They also concluded that these children's academic achievement, as measured by grades, may not be significantly impacted by the father not being presence in the home as is typically assumed.

In another study by the present researcher and her colleagues that included only low income African American children, the associations among self-esteem, academic achievement, adaptive functioning, and maladaptive behavior were examined (Gaskin & Tucker, 1992). The results of this study revealed no significant relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement of the low income African American children being investigated. It was also found that as self-esteem scores increased for males, their adaptive function scores decreased; however, as the self-esteem scores increased for females, their adaptive functioning scores increased. Similarly, as self-esteem scores increased for males, their maladaptive behavior scores increased; however, as the self-esteem scores increased for females, their maladaptive behavior decreased. Indeed, as asserted by Kunjufu (1988), it may be more important among African American males to be popular among one's peer group and feel good about

one's self than to perform well academically and be ostracized by the peer group. Gaskin & Tucker (1992) conclusioned that simply boosting the self-esteem of African American children, as is commonly emphasized, will not ensure their academic success and thus their empowerment potential.

The present researcher and her colleagues used the findings from their research to develop an after-school "Research-Based Model Partnership Education Program to Improve the Academic Achievement and Adaptive Functioning of Low Income African American Children" (Tucker, Chennault, et. al., 1992). The Model Program provides tutoring, adaptive skills training, self-management of behavior skills training (e.g., how to manage anger), information and field trips to enhance knowledge and appreciation of African American culture, and parenting skills training. All tutoring and skills training are taught using cognitive modeling and self-instruction (Michenbaun, 1977) based approaches which foster self-management of success -- a key to self empowerment and thus to the future empowerment of the African American family.

The Model Program is evidence of how the community can work together to facilitate the empowerment goal. The Model Program is conducted at the Mt. Olive African Methodist Episcopal Church and is implemented by parents, Caucasian American teachers, African American teachers, local university professors and students, and community resource persons. The funding partnership include local businesses, the local school board, the University of Florida, donations from community members, the Jesse Ball duPont Fund, and the Hitachi Foundation -- the

current major funding sources. The Model Program is in its fourth year and has received over $400,000 in funding. Qualitative and quantitative data that have been collected have evidenced that the program has had a significant positive impact on the academic achievement of the children it serves. The Model Program represents a partnership effort for the empowerment of African American children that was initiated by African Americans "pulling themselves up by their bootstraps."

In addition to programs such as the Model Program described above, teachers who see children's cultural differences as exciting and enriching are needed to empower African American children . Additionally, more African American teachers with whom these children can identify, and who can serve as role models with power and authority are also needed (Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, 1992). This is especially important given that most classrooms are headed by middle class, Caucasian teachers. According to Cushner et al., (1992), "at best, such teachers are predisposed to regard diversity as interesting; at worst, they are likely to regard it as a deficit." Training of teachers in cross cultural communication and in culturally relative teaching strategies seems particularly important for creating educational environments conducive to theempowerment of African American children -- future leaders of efforts to empower the African American family.

Strategy VII: Promotion of a Wholistic View of African Americans That Recognizes Their Existing Strengths, Achievements, and Power, and Thus Reinforces Efforts for Future Empowerment of the African American Family

A wholistic view of African Americans recognizes that they fall along the socioeconomic spectrum to greater and lesser degrees and that African American families are very diverse in their structure and function. This diversity is typically overlooked in concentrated attention to lower socioeconomic single-parent African American families whose life situations have been used to create a racist stereotype of the African American family (Lyles & Carter, 1982). Promotion of a wholistic view of the African American family involves calling attention to and studying the wide range of families that this umbrella term represents and seeing their strengths, achievements, and power as well as their problems and struggles. Increased focus on the middle class and upper class African American families, including their values and strengths, will provide insights for empowering low income African American families with whom they share ties through family support networks and/or history and culture.

What specifically can be done to promote a wholistic view of the African American family toward the goal of its empowerment? First, promotion of the value of African American culture through a "difference model" research approach, and more research on the success attainment and family stability of middle class and upper class African American families is needed. An increased research focus on two-parent African American families is also needed; such research has been relatively neglected in systemic observational research (Hampson, Beavers, & Hulgus, 1990). Research findings may have implications for further empowering of middle class and upper class families who can then make greater contributions to the empowerment of all African American families.

Second, upper class and middle class African Americans can be invited to America's classrooms and to lower income African American communities to discuss what they did to achieve their economic power. These African American leaders can also be invited to take leadership in organizing educational and skills training programs in these schools and communities that will facilitate empowerment of the African American children and parents.

Third, textbooks and the media must move away from promoting negative images and stereotypes of African American families and move toward a focus on the achievements of African Americans and on the strengths of one-parent and two-parent nuclear families and extended families which are functioning well to meet the needs of family members (Baptiste, 1986). The common focus on the adaptive and survival skills of African American families in a racist and an oppressive socioeconomic environment as their only strength is inadequate and may only promote the mentality of striving only to survive and associating self-esteem primarily with this feat. The focus on the strengths of African Americans should include discussions bout such topics as how over 70.8 thousand African Americans achieved ownership of firms with paid employees that number over 220.5 thousand (Pluski & Williams, 1989). Indeed, such discussions will recognize the typically forgotten fact that African Americans continue to make major contributions to the empowerment of their country as they struggle for self-empowerment.

Conclusion

Clearly, a "difference model" approach is important in identifying factors important in empowering African American families and in developing the needed strategies for facilitating this empowerment process. This approach is wholistic in nature in that it gives concentrated attention to lower class, middle class, and upper class African American families, recognizes the different family structures and functions that exist across these classes of families, and views these families as having separate and collective potential for enabling each other "to pull themselves up by their bootstraps." The "difference model" approach to empowering the African American family seeks culturally relative family empowerment strategies and includes partnership efforts with systems within the larger society. Major goals of these partnerships and other empowerment strategies must be family stability, support of culturally relative family values, educational advancement, and economic development that will enable African American families to control their own destinies. Indeed, achievement of these goals will likely ensure the necessary empowerment of the diverse groups of Americans linked by history, threads of culture, kinships, and support networks that we call "the African American family."

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