

**The Strengths of Families
of Color: Implications
for Practice**

**CalSWEC Fairness and
Equity Symposium**

Robert B. Hill, Ph. D.

April 4, 2005

Introduction

- **Cultural Strengths**
- **Alternative Family Structures**
- **Diverse Child-Rearing Patterns**
- **Flexible Family Roles**
- **Functions of Extended Families**
- **Examples of Cultural Insensitivity**
- **Examples of Cultural Competence**

Cultural Strengths

- **Centrality and Safety of Children**
- **Mutual Support and Connectedness**
- **Priority of Group over the Individual**
- **Diverse Family Structures and Roles**
- **Importance of Function Over Structure**
- **High Regard for Elderly and Ancestors**
- **Strong Spiritual Orientation**

Alternative Family Structures

- **Members Within Same Households**
- **Members of Connected Households**
- **Extended Family Networks**
- **Godparents and Other Fictive Kin**
- **Female-Headed Single-Parent Families**
- **Male-Headed Single-Parent Families**

Diverse Child-Rearing Patterns

- **Racial and Ethnic Identity**
- **Bicultural Socialization**
- **Surrogate Parenting**
- **Informal Adoption**
- **Formal Adoption**
- **Stability of Children**
- **Kinship Foster Care**

Informal Adoption Patterns

- **Adoption agencies targeted 2-parents, middle-income, young and no children**
- **Informal adoptive families are 1-parent, low-income, older and have children**
- **800,000 black children not living with parents are informally reared by kin.**
- **200,000 are in the foster care system**

Flexible Family Roles

- **Resilience of Single-Parent Families**
- **High Academic Aspirations for Children**
- **Older Children Raising Younger Siblings**
- **Black—Older Brother or Sister**
- **Hispanic--Older Sister**
- **Single-Parent Families Headed by Men**
- **Support from Paternal Relatives**

Functions of Extended Families

- **Strong Bonds Between Households**
- **Mutual Tangible and Emotional Support**
- **Child Care, Respite Care, Housing**
- **Family Preservation and Reunification**
- **Ensuring Cultural Permanency**
- **Ensuring Safety of Children**
- **Godparents and Standby Guardians**

Role Confusion in Extended Families

- **Too Flexible Family Roles**
- **Over-Burdened Grandparents**
- **Young Non-Evolved Grandmothers**
- **Three-Generational Households**
- **Excessive Role of Parental Children**
- **Too Intrusive Noncustodial Parents**

Examples of Cultural Insensitivity

Minorities abuse children more than whites

Minorities are not interested in adoption

Drug addicts physically abuse their children

Minority fathers are “deadbeat dads”

The apples do not fall far from the tree

Kin are too old/poor to care for children

Kin care is not as permanent as adoption

Examples of Cultural Competence

- **Assessing Assets & Capacities of Clients**
- **Identifying Cultural Strengths of Clients**
- **Locating Surrogate Parents**
- **Godparents and Successor Guardians**
- **Locating and Assessing Role of Fathers**
- **Exploring Resources of Father's Kin**
- **Identifying Resources in the Community**

Conclusions

More Culturally Sensitive Strategies

Assessing Both Risks and Assets

More Emphasis on Family Preservation

Greater Use of Extended Families

More Family Conferences

Planning for Successor Guardians

More Family-Strengthening Practices