STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF MULTICULTURAL FAMILY CHILD-REARING

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U.S. A “DIVERSE NATION”

- Multiple Religions, Races, National Origins
- Colonial Times, Revolutionary, Early 19th Century (Several “Minority” Protestants)
- Late 19th & Early 20th Centuries: Irish-Catholic; Jews; Italians; E. Europe; Mexico
- Increased Racial, Religious, & National Diversity with 1965 Immigration Law
2 MAJOR MODELS OF DIVERSITY: MULTI-CULTURALISM Vs. ASSIMILATION

Multi-Culturalism: Groups Stay to Themselves
Assimilation: Groups Overlap, Interact
IDENTITY FORMATION IN SINGLE CULTURE SOCIETIES

• EX: Japanese Visitor to U.S.
• American Proudly Explaining U.S. Diversity: Many Races, Religions, National Origins, Cultures
• Japanese Visitor’s Response:
• “Ah! I Understand Your Distress!”
• Easy to Explain Identity to Japanese Child!
IDENTITY FORMATION IN COMPLEX SOCIETIES

• BIG Problem When There Are Many Groups
• BIGGER Problem When INDIVIDUAL Belongs to Multiple Groups!

Single Group Identity Formation

VS.

Mixed Background Identity Formation

How Can Parents Deal With This?
KEY QUESTION – LONG IGNORED

• What Is It Like To Be an “Assimilator”?  
• Ignored Until 1990s: Inter-RACIAL Issues Arose  
• Why Do THESE People Want In?  
• However – the Issues Are Very Similar:  
  – Inter- RACIAL Identity & Boundaries  
  – Inter-CULTURAL Identity & Boundaries  
• What Is It Like to Grow Up @ the Boundaries?
BASIC ISSUE OF THE STUDY

• What’s It Like to Grow Up in a “Mixed” Family?
• How Do They Operate?
• How Do Parents Who Have Different Cultural Values Cooperate in Parenting?
• What Is the Impact on Their Children?
DESCRIPTION OF METHODOLOGY

• “Qualitative” (Informal) Interviews
• 30 Respondents from “Mixed” Families
• S.E. Michigan & Washington, DC Areas
• Aged 18 Through 70 (Raised In Different Eras)
• Major Categories of Families:
  – Inter-Racial – 10
  – Inter-Nationality – 14 (Some Also Multi-Religion)
  – Inter-Religion – 3 (All Christian-Jewish)
  – “Other” (3: Immigration; Social Class; Stepparent)
DISTINCTLY MULTI-CULTURAL FAMILY PROBLEMS

• Dealing with the Diversity of Cultures & People in the Family

• So Big! So Many Languages! Different Foods! Confusing! (Jeanette)

• Different Races Black & Caucasian (Teresa)

• Different Religions & Nationalities (Sarah) Jewish, Christian, Greek, Romanian

• Stand Out as “Different” in Community
PROBLEMS CHILDREN ENCOUNTER

• Developing a Sense of Identity
  – For Individual  – For Family as a Whole

• Sense of Place in Wider Community

• Need to Respond to Identity Questions
  – Who (What) ARE You Anyway?
  – Census – School Records – Personal Questions

• Always an “Outsider” – Even in Family!
  – Leslie (Filipino/Caucasian): No more Thanksgiving!
COMMUNITY DEFINITIONS

• Community Defines Family Identity
• School, Neighborhood, Whatever Local Community Defined As Important (Robert: Ethnic Differences NOT important in a Racially Divided Town)
• Sarah – “Exotic” in Small Town; “ Outsider” in Suburb of Large City ( “Go Home!”)
• Derek – Black & German – Easier for Him in Military Than Cousins in Louisiana Community
NO PLACE FOR “MIXED” FAMILIES

• Deanna (Black & Korean) Teresa (Black & Caucasian) Teresa: Every Group Imaginable Is There – But Not Mixed!

• Non-acceptance Of Siblings (Karen – Half Asian & Her Caucasian “Brother”)

• Regina (Brazilian/Polish): Rejected in Hamtramck

PROBLEM: DEVELOPING A SENSE OF PERSONAL & FAMILIAL IDENTITY

• What Am I? – What Are WE?
• Where Does This Identity Come From?
  – German-Missouri Synod Lutheran Girl
  – Sarah: “Lot of Stuff from Both Sides” – “Religion: Goes With Mother” – “No! Father!” – Open Re Differences
  – Teresa: Black OR White
  – Jeanette: “Just say You’re Irish!”
HANDLING PROBLEMS SUCCESSFULLY

• Anita (Mexican & Puerto Rican) – Different Resolutions by Each Sibling.

• Vickie’s family: Jewish; Catholic; “Into the Irish Thing.”

• Remarkable Ability to View Cultural Models as Options Open to Them.

• Cultural Differences – A Cafeteria of Interesting Alternatives

• View Cultural Differences With Respect & Interest – Not As a Threat to One’s Own
FOCUS ON THE RELATIONSHIPS

• Close Social Ties – in Spite of Cultural Differences

• Cultural Differences do NOT Break the Social Bonds.

• EX: Anita: Monthly Brunch

• EX: Vickie: How Often Do You Contact Siblings? Every Day Mostly! Find Out How the Kids Are!

• Cooking All the Jewish Foods – Corned Beef & Cabbage on St. Patrick’s Day
FOCUS ON RELATIONSHIPS (ctd)

• Derek: Visit My Mother’s Family In Germany – “My Father Came From A Large Family” ...
• “We Enjoyed Our Times There” – “It Was A Blast”
• Defining Cultural Differences As Unimportant
• Defining Cultural Differences As Interesting Options – Not As A Threat
STRESSING SHARED CULTURAL TRAITS

• Anita: Hispanic – Mexican – Puerto Rican
• Each Free To Stress His/Her Own Culture – Others Enjoy Sharing It.
• Spanish Language
• 12 Days Of Christmas Celebration
• Weddings, 1\textsuperscript{st} Communions, Coming Of Age Ceremony For 15 Year Old Girls
• Sarah: Jewish & Christian – Unity In Left Wing Politics
FINDING SIMILARITIES WITHIN DIFFERENCES

Even For Families With Problems – Jeanette:

- Father Could Calm Mother’s Relative Down
- Focus On Similarity Of Religion Vs Nationality
- Friendship With Mother’s Brother
STRESSING LONG TERM ASSETS

• Derek – Being Black & German Gave Him A Broader Perspective
• Married An Asian Woman
• “Our Kids Are Eligible For All Kinds Of Scholarships!”
• Vickie: “People Ask How To Make Mixed Marriage Work. If Religion Matters To You, It Won’t Work. Since It Doesn’t To Us, It’s Fine!”
• Jewish & Catholic Sisters – Defend Each Other As “Religious”!
SUCCESSFUL PROBLEM MANAGEMENT

• Critical Role of Parents – Talk About It!
  – Be Open! (NOT “Just Say Irish!”)
  – Karen: Little Support (Mother upset; Father – “Race Like Big Ears”)

• Cafeteria Approach to Culture
  – Constant Contact with Various Cultures (Anita, Jeff)
  – Differences Accepted – Hybrids: “White Boy”
SUMMARY – THE NEGATIVE

• Major Parental Error:
  – Ignore It! Don’t Talk About It!
  – Karen’s White Father: “Skin Color is Like Having Big Ears.”
  – Kids WILL Hear Negative Comments from Community
  – Children Cannot Handle These Issues on Their Own
  – Diverse Families Have to Help Kids Deal with Diverse Ethnic Identities
SUMMARY – THE POSITIVE

• Major Asset:
  – Discussing the Differences ...
  – In a Positive Context ...
  – Stress WHY They Brought Family Together:
    • Why Did They Marry?
    • What Appealed to Them About Different Race? Culture?
    • Why Did They Adopt Cross-Racial Children?
SUMMARY – THE POSITIVE

• Stress to Children Their Considerable Advantage in the Global Society:
• Derek: “My Kids Are Eligible for All Kinds of Scholarships!”
• “Look How Many Different Cultural Settings They Will Be Comfortable In!”
• Mixed Background People Better Prepared for the Modern World!