

## **PERFORMANCE OF BLACK GRANDMOTHERS: PERCEPTIONS OF THREE GENERATIONS OF FEMALES**

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*The purposes of this study were to (a) identify perceptions of 3 generations about the influence of black grandmothers; (b) describe contributions of black grandmothers and detect obstacles that limit their success; and (c) recommend curricula for programs to enhance success of black grandmothers. The 253 subjects were black grandmothers (n = 76), mothers (n = 65), and granddaughters (n = 112). Each generation completed the Grandparent Strengths and Needs Inventory. A high degree of agreement among generations revealed that teaching is perceived as the greatest strength of grandmothers. Their greatest limitation was the need for information about individual grandchildren.*

Lifelong learning is necessary so individuals are prepared to fulfill their roles at every age. Support for this broad perspective is difficult to obtain because no tradition exists to guide the education of older adults, and they have no precedent for relying on younger relatives as essential sources of learning. A related obstacle is the widespread impression that, because children are the only population required to attend school, their generation must assume the burden of merging changing times with tradition. A more beneficial paradigm is to think about lifespan development in a way that encourages all age groups to

undergo some aspects of social change together. Continuous exposure of grandparents, parents, and grandchildren to education that emphasizes reciprocal learning from one another could enable the degree of age integration needed to sustain a cohesive society (Cohen, 2001).

Some observers believe that, until greater numbers of mothers and fathers take advantage of parent classes, there is little reason to urge education for grandparents. However, this is not a matter of sequence-of doing one thing before starting another. Grandparents and parents both need suitable curricula because family development requires social adaptation by all generations. Older adults who keep learning and adjust to changing times will be considered "wise" and more likely sought out for advice. This shift in perception means that wisdom, as defined in the contemporary world, requires more than just knowledge of the past. Something of the present must be appreciated as well, including awareness regarding the needs of younger relatives and understanding how to support attainment of their goals (Vaillant, 2003). This presentation examines how black grandmothers are perceived in the performance of their family role, and identifies realms of learning that could help them improve their influence.

### ***GENERATIONAL OBSTACLES***

The black population in the United States, consisting of nearly 40 million people, is forecast to become 60 million by the year 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). While the experiences of individual children, parents, and grandparents vary, normative conditions encountered by this group are viewed as disappointing and continue to motivate concern and support of the general society. Blacks from every socioeconomic status share certain experiences that arise from the visibility of color and resulting ambiguity of living in the two worlds of the black community and the majority culture. The stress and disappointments that define this struggle of each generation as well as adaptive strengths that have evolved to effectively cope with them are factors to consider in planning education for grandparents.

#### ***Children***

Growing up in poverty is more common among black (53%) children than for their Hispanic (43%) or white (19%) peers (National Center for Children in Poverty, <http://www.nccp.org/about.html>). Whereas 11% of poverty students quit high school before graduating, just 5% of middle-income and 2% of affluent youngsters do. This

disadvantage is underscored by dropout rates that are based on ethnicity. The proportion of blacks (16%) that do not finish high school is higher than for white (8%) or Asian/Pacific Islander (4%) students, and exceeded only by Hispanics (36%) (United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). The consequent gap in academic preparation means that many black youth are extremely limited in occupational opportunities (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003).

Health and safety are also powerful factors that can influence success. In the United States, obesity is the greatest single threat to public health, accounting for more fatalities than AIDS and all cancers and accidents combined. Approximately 15% of white youth classify as obese. However, the rate of obesity among blacks and Hispanics is 25% (United States Department of Education, National Center for Health Statistics, 2003). Black children have less access than other ethnic groups to medical care, suffer greater nutritional deficits, and are more often exposed to unwed pregnancies, environmental hazards, and violent behavior. The proportion of young males behind bars, on parole, or probation is 23% for blacks, 10% for Hispanics, and 6% for whites (Beck, 2003). Blacks are the only subpopulation whose lifespan has actually declined because of homicide. Nearly 80% of Americans who die prematurely, between 15 and 44 years of age, are black (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2004).

### *Parents*

Being a single mother is normative in black (63%) families and occurs much more often than for Hispanics (33%) or whites (23%) (Strom et al., 2002). Child development is undermined when fathers fail to provide their contribution to guidance, income, and security. Elsewhere we have described the challenges of black fathers from intact families and how they perform in the estimate of children and themselves (Strom, Amukarmara, Strom, Beckert, & Strom, 2000). Black single mothers must assume a greater than ordinary burden for raising children. Their situation is more difficult owing to a lower level of education that translates into below-average wages. It is essential for them to stretch meager funds to provide for the needs of their children and arrange for surrogate care (Taylor, Jackson & Chatters, 1997).

### *Grandparents*

Aging often brings additional hardships to blacks. The majority of them did not complete high school. Low salaries and lengthy layoffs

characterized their employment. As a result, they have little in the way of retirement benefits like pensions, health insurance, or savings (Strom, Carter, & Bartmess, 2004). They generally leave the workforce at an earlier age, and are more dependent upon Social Security and Medicaid. Hypertension is twice as prevalent among black older adults than whites (Vaillant, 2003). They suffer from their inadequate education, insufficient income, substandard housing, poor health, and a shorter average lifespan than whites and Hispanics. Because they grew up before civil rights implementation, black elders have commonly been the victims of greater racial prejudice than younger relatives (Gelfand, 2003).

## **METHOD**

### *Subjects*

Three self-selected samples of non consanguineous black females included 76 grandmothers, 65 mothers, and 112 granddaughters. The 253 subjects were drawn from two urban centers in the Southeast and Southwest regions of the United States. Only grandparents whose grandchildren were between 6 and 18 years of age, parents whose children were between 6 and 18 years of age, and children between 6 and 18 years of age were invited to join the study. Potential subjects were identified with the assistance of social workers, black community organizations, school faculties, and religious leaders. Most grandmothers were recruited at senior centers; a majority of parents and grandchildren were recruited with help from school administrators. A letter to parents was sent by principals explaining the purpose of the survey, and asking them to complete a form that would be available at one of several social events scheduled at school. Parents were asked to grant permission for children to complete a survey at school with directions to be provided by their teacher. Parents and grandchildren were assured that responses would never be shown to their grandparents. All three generations were told that the data would be used for devising a curriculum to help grandparents understand the needs of younger relatives and support their success.

Most (58%) grandmother participants were 30 to 59 years of age, married (59%), high school graduates (58%), employed (58%), and had annual incomes less than \$20,000 (53%). The majority (75%) lived less than 25 miles from the granddaughter that they reported on, and over half (57%) spent more than 10 hours a month interacting with the younger relative. The mother participants were generally under age

35 (59%), married (57%), high-school graduates (69%), and had annual household incomes that exceeded \$20,000 (81%). Participating granddaughters were 6 to 11 years of age (28%) and 12 to 18 years of age (72%).

### *Instrumentation*

The Grandparent Strengths and Needs Inventory (GSNI) helps grandparents become aware of their favorable qualities and to identify aspects of their family relationship in which further growth is needed (Strom & Strom, 1993). This instrument guides educators who plan programs for older adults in churches, senior centers, colleges, public schools, and assisted-living facilities. The most common uses of the inventory are to determine how grandparents are perceived by themselves and family members, offer feedback about changes that individuals should consider making, devise suitable curriculum themes for target groups, and evaluate behavior changes in response to educational intervention.

Grandparent effectiveness is evaluated using 60 Likert-type items, divided equally into the following six subscales that emphasize separate dimensions of grandparent development:

- Satisfaction-aspects of being a grandparent that are seen as pleasing.
- Success-ways in which grandparents successfully perform their role.
- Teaching-the kinds of lessons grandparents are expected to provide.
- Difficulty-problems encountered with the obligations of grandparenting.
- Frustration-behaviors of grandchildren that are upsetting to grandparents.
- Information Needs-things grandparents need to know about grandchildren.

Three subscales (Satisfaction, Success, and Teaching) are combined to yield an index of grandparent *Potentials*. The remaining subscales (Difficulty, Frustration, and Information Needs) provide an index of grandparent *Concerns*. Together, the six subscale scores and the two overall indices provide important information about the behavior of grandparents.

In the present study, grandparents, parents, and grandchildren completed separate versions of the GSNI. The items are presented in identical order and item content is the same, but the wording differs for each generation. To illustrate, item 11 from the grandparent version states, "I am good at listening to my grandchild." The version for parents for the same item reads, "My parent is good at listening to my child." The grandchild version states, "My grandparent is good at listening to me." Grandmothers, mothers, and granddaughters were asked to keep one granddaughter or grandmother in mind when responding to the survey for consistency purposes. All three versions are scored the same, by assigning numerical values of 4, 3, 2 or 1 to each of 60 items. Responses most indicative of grandparent strengths are valued 4, with diminishing values assigned to other answers on the basis of their distance from the best response. Item mean scores of 2.5 or greater are considered favorable and identified as strengths; specifically, 2.5 to 2.99 are slightly favorable, and 3.0 to 4.0 are highly favorable. Item mean scores of 2.49 and below are unfavorable; 2.0 to 2.49 are slightly unfavorable and 1.0 to 2.0 are highly unfavorable.

#### *Reliability and Validity of the GSNI*

Reliability was initially determined during an intervention program with 760 grandparent, parent, and grandchild respondents. Alpha coefficients from .90 to .93 were obtained for each subpopulation (grandparents, parents, and grandchildren) between their pretest, a posttest administered 12 weeks thereafter, and a delayed posttest given 12 weeks later (Strom & Strom, 1993). Subsequently, similar alphas were calculated involving 2,535 black, white, and Hispanic, families (Strom *et al.*, 1997). The Potentials and Concerns have ranged from .91 to .95.

The present study yielded high reliability coefficients for each of the six scales and overall indexes. Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients on Potentials and Concerns were .91 and .93, respectively, for the sample of 235 subjects. By generation, the alpha coefficients for grandmothers were .91 for Potentials, .95 for Concerns; for mothers .94 for Potentials, .92 for Concerns; and for granddaughters .89 for Potentials, and .93 for Concerns.

Validity of the GSNI has been established. A factor analysis of responses of 2,012 inventories from culturally-diverse grandparents, parents, and grandchildren found that the underlying structure of the GSNI matches the hypothesized dimensions suggested by position of 60 items of six scales. A solution set at six factors yielded

the best fit, accounting for 49.2% of the variance (Collinsworth, Strom, Strom, & Young, 1991).

### *Research Design*

A univariate, independent-groups design was applied. The primary independent variable is "generation" with three levels (grandmother, mother, and granddaughter) to allow for intergenerational comparisons. The remaining independent variables were age of the grandmother, amount of time the grandmother spent with her grandchild, living distance between grandmothers and grandchild, grandmother income, grandmother employment, grandmother marital status, mother age, mother education, mother marital status, mother income, and granddaughter age. The dependent variables were the Potentials index, Concerns index, six scales, and 60 individual items of the Grandparent Strengths and Needs Inventory.

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedures was carried out for the overall GSNI score, the Potentials and Concerns indices, each of the six scales, and individual items. Subsequent posthoc analyses were conducted for each analysis of variance that yielded statistically significant results. Fisher Least Significant Differences (LSD) method was used for all posthoc analysis to determine source of significance between each pair of generations while also controlling for Type I error. Further tests found how grandmother performance was influenced by each of the remaining independent variables.

Binomial comparisons were made for each of the 60 GSNI items. The frequency with which parents, grandparents, and grandchildren responded "never" or "seldom" was compared to the frequency with which they answered "often" or "always" to ascertain if a significant number of responses were favorable for each item. Descriptive statistics were used to identify items and scales responded to most favorably or most negatively by the combined groups and by each generation.

### **RESULTS**

A group score of 2.5, the absolute mean on a 4 point scale, is used to differentiate favorable and unfavorable perceptions reflected by the total GSNI score, Potentials and Concerns index scores, and the six scales. Table I, Generation Means, ANOVAs, and *t-tests* of GSNI Scales, shows that the total score assigned to grandmothers by each generation exceeded 2.5. The index for Potentials (Satisfaction, Success and Teaching) is higher than the Concerns index (Difficulty,

Table 1. Generation Means, ANOVAs, and t-tests of GSNI Scales

Scale	Generation Means			F	Significant ( $p < .05$ ) LSD Comparison of generations		
	Grandmother 1	Mother 2	Granddaughter 3		1 & 2	1&3	2&3
Satisfaction	3.32	3.34	3.35	0.136			
Success	3.42	3.34	3.37	0.684			
Teaching	3.64	3.40	3.48	4.626**	X	X	
Potentials	3.46	3.36	3.40	1.233			
Difficulty	3.38	3.27	3.13	3.290 <sup>†</sup>		X	
Frustration	3.23	3.25	3.14	0.761			
Information	2.76	2.49	2.69	2.078			
Concerns	3.12	3.00	2.99	1.332			
Total	3.29	3.18	3.20	1.914			

\*\* $p < .05$

<sup>†</sup> $p < .01$

Frustration, and Information Needs) for every generation. A higher Potentials index reflects overall perceptions of grandmothers who see their role as enjoyable. Such grandmothers are more likely to generate optimism and inspire others around them to achieve positive relationships and cope with difficulties.

A comparison of responses to 60 items revealed two trends. First, the generations were in accord on a remarkable majority of items. No significant generational differences were detected for the total GSNI score or Potentials and Concerns indexes. Second, when difference did occur, it was usually the case that grandmothers rated themselves higher than one or both of the other generations. One explanation could be that, although the grandmothers are doing very well, they tend to overestimate their performance. A second possibility reflects other studies indicating that persons with lower education, lower income, and older age are more susceptible to positive response bias (Vaillant, 2003). Grandmothers had less education and lower incomes than mothers in this study.

All generations identified Teaching as the greatest strength of grandmothers. The total mean score grandmothers gave themselves on this scale was 3.64, compared to 3.40 for mothers, and 3.48 for granddaughters. Significant differences were detected between the mean ratings of the three groups ( $F = 4.626$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Subsequent protected *t-tests* using Fisher's Least Significant Difference (LSD) method found the source of significance to be between



grandmothers' and mothers' mean ratings and between grandmothers' and granddaughters' mean ratings. Grandmothers consistently gave themselves higher ratings as teachers than did mothers or granddaughters. Comparison of items on this scale show that, although all groups gave favorable ratings, perceptions differed on items related to teaching granddaughters to care about other people, teaching about religion by setting a good example, teaching family history and traditions, and teaching what grandmothers expect of their granddaughters.

Table 1 indicates a statistically significant difference between the mean ratings of the three groups on the Difficulty scale ( $F=3, 290, p < .05$ ). Subsequent Fisher LSD t-tests revealed the  $F$  result was due to a difference in ratings of grandmothers who reported the highest score for themselves, and granddaughters who gave grandmothers the lowest ratings. The granddaughters felt that grandmothers had much greater difficulty offering advice to their daughters than was acknowledged by either of the adult groups. Mothers and granddaughters reported that grandmothers had greater difficulty in getting along with their daughters and looking at things in new ways than was recognized by grandmothers.

The Information Needs scale was identified as the realm of greatest limitation. Table 2 (Means, ANOVAs and Protected t-tests (LSD) Results for the Information Needs Scale) shows that mothers gave grandmothers unfavorable ratings for 6 of 10 items. Specifically, mothers reported that the grandmothers needed more information about the attitudes of this child's age group (Item 57,  $M = 2.25$ ); grandmothers needed more information about the difficult choices the child has to make at this age (Item 59,  $M = 2.35$ ); grandmothers needed more information about the stress the child has to manage (Item 54,  $M = 2.38$ ); grandmothers needed more information about the fears and worries of the child (Item 52,  $M = 2.48$ ); grandmothers needed more information about the child's goals (Item 53,  $M = 2.48$ ); and, grandmothers needed more information on how to share ideas with the child while watching television together (Item 60,  $M = 2.45$ ).

Comparison of ratings on identified significant differences on two items. Item 55 on Table 2 shows that the mothers reported that grandmothers have a greater need for information about the way their granddaughter is being raised than was recognized by grandmothers and granddaughters. Item 60 indicates that mothers reported a greater grandmother need, compared to grandmothers and granddaughters, for information about how to share ideas with the grandchild while watching television.

Table 2. Means, ANOVAs and Protected *t*-tests (LSD) Results for the Information-Needs Scale

Grandparent information needs	Generation Means				<i>F</i>	Significant ( <i>p</i> < .05) LSD		
	Grandmother	Mother	Granddaughter	Comparison of generations				
	1	2	3	1 & 2		1 & 3	2 & 3	
51. School experience of grandchild	2.66	2.60	2.63	0.053				
52. Fears and worries of grandchild	2.61	2.48	2.55	0.261				
53. Goals grandchild has chosen	2.74	2.48	2.50	1.384				
54. Stress that the grandchild must manage	2.59	2.38	2.51	0.725				
55. The way grandchild is being raised	3.17	2.69	2.90	3.130*	X			
56. Self-esteem of grandchild	2.88	2.68	2.80	0.640				
57. Attitudes of grandchild's age group	2.64	2.25	2.60	2.805				
58. Friendships of grandchild	2.64	2.52	2.65	0.308				
59. Difficult choices grandchild must make at this age	2.72	2.35	2.70	2.814				
60. How to share ideas with grandchild while watching television together	2.91	2.45	3.08	7.454**	X		X	

\* *p* < .05\*\* *p* < .01

### **Demographic Variables**

Nine dependent variables (the six scales, Potentials index, Concerns index, and total score) were analyzed in relation to the demographic variables. Amount of time that grandmothers spent with granddaughters was divided into two categories: less than 10 hours per month, and 10 hours or more a month. The total instrument ratings for grandmothers spending 10 or more hours per month with their granddaughter ( $M = 3.28$ ) were significantly higher ( $t = 3.28$ ,  $df = 251$ ,  $P < .01$ ) than the ratings for those spending less than 10 hours ( $M = 3.15$ ). The Potentials Index was significantly higher ( $t = 3.46$ ,  $df = 251$ ,  $P < .05$ ) when greater amounts of time was spent with granddaughters ( $M = 3.46$ ) than when less time was spent together ( $M = 3.34$ ). Ratings on scales that comprise the Potential Index reveal that grandmothers find significantly higher levels of satisfaction with their role ( $t = 2.08$ ,  $p < .05$ ) when more time is spent with a grandchild ( $M = 3.39$ ) than when less time was spent together ( $M = 3.27$ ). Grandmothers are also rated as better teachers ( $t = 2.58$ ,  $df = 234$ ,  $p < .01$ ) when more time was spent together ( $M = 3.58$ ) than when there was less time ( $M = 3.42$ ). Grandmothers are viewed as more able to cope with the difficult aspects of their role ( $t = 2.12$ ,  $p < .05$ ) when greater time was spent with a grandchild ( $M = 3.32$ ) than when less time was spent together ( $M = 3.14$ ).

Mother age was divided into two categories: young mothers age 18 to 34 years, and older mothers age 35 or more years. *T-tests* detected a significant difference for the total GSNI score ( $t = 2.21$ ,  $df = 63$ ,  $P < .05$ ). Ratings for grandmother performance were slightly higher when the mothers were older ( $M = 3.30$ ) than when mothers were young ( $M = 3.10$ ). Grandmothers were perceived as experiencing more success when mothers were older than when mothers were younger ( $t = 2.27$ ,  $df = 63$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Grandmother mean-success-scale rating was 3.50 when mothers were age 35 or older compared to 3.22 when mothers were less than 35 years old. Results were also significant for the Information Needs scale ( $t = 1.98$ ,  $df = 63$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and the Concerns Index ( $t = 1.97$ ,  $df = 63$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

Mother marital-status categories were married and unmarried. The unmarried group included mothers never married, divorced, or widowed. *T-tests* detected a significant difference for the total GSNI score ( $t = 1.99$ ,  $df = 251$ ,  $P < .05$ ). Ratings of grandmother performance were significantly higher when the mothers were married ( $M = 3.27$ ) than when mothers were unmarried ( $M = 3.18$ ). Mean ratings on the Concerns Index indicate that when mothers were unmarried ( $M = 3.11$ ), grandmothers are rated as having greater

Concerns ( $t = 2.04$ ,  $df = 251$ ,  $p < .05$ ) than when mothers were married ( $M = 3.11$ ). Similarly, ratings on Frustration show a significant difference between means ( $t = 2.04$ ,  $df = 251$ ,  $P < .05$ ), with grandmothers handling frustrations better when mothers are married ( $M = 3.26$ ) than when mothers are unmarried ( $M = 3.11$ ).

*T-tests* did not identify significant differences for grandmother age (under 65 or over), grandmother annual household income (more/less than \$20,000), grandparent marital status (married or unmarried), grandmother education (less/more than high school graduation), distance living apart from granddaughter (less/more than 25 miles), and age (6 to 11 years and 12 to 18 years) of granddaughter on any of the dependent variables.

## *DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS*

Several findings provide principles for consideration in devising curriculum for black grandmothers.

### *Help Grandmothers Help Support the Education of Grandchildren*

Two-thirds of black children do not live with their father. In these families grandmothers and their single-parent daughters need to cooperate to maximize education opportunities for grandchildren. Success at home is enhanced when mothers and grandmothers set goals together, mutually reinforce agreed-upon lessons, and share observations about the child. Grandmothers should be aware of how expectations of teachers have changed in response to the national "No Child Left Behind" Act. Knowing how to explore opportunities for higher education, post high school vocational training, and financial aid are important to guide and motivate youth who might otherwise believe they must abandon their dreams.

Vartan Gregorian (1997), president of the Carnegie Corporation, has suggested 10 practical steps he believes could improve the quality of public schools. One of the steps calls for encouraging greater grandparent involvement in school affairs of grandchildren, particularly in single-parent households. Most schools have ignored the need to develop a partnership with grandparents, even though an increasing number of them are engaged in raising grandchildren, acting as caretakers, and serving as the main source of volunteers in classrooms. We have found in our inner-city projects that a greater proportion (65%) of minority children are cared for before and after school by grandparents than by any other source. Grandparents can

perform their important role more effectively when they are well informed regarding child development, and understand how schooling differs from the way things used to be when they raised their children (Strom & Strom, 1999).

The recommendations of Vartan Gregorian can be implemented by establishing Grandparent Education Councils in schools. Unlike other organizations linking families with schools, Grandparent Education Councils focus exclusively on responsibilities and educational needs of grandparents. This approach originated with a cooperative effort by the authors and 32 elementary and junior high schools in Phoenix, Arizona. The members of each school council consist of grandparents, a volunteer coordinator, and representative of the faculty, typically the principal. No school funds or resources are diverted from the education of children. To achieve its goal, each grandparent education council performs the following functions (Strom & Strom, 1999):

1. Schedules free grandparent-education sessions offered biweekly at the school.
2. Informs grandparents about opportunities to learn and encourages them to attend.
3. Provides free care for preschoolers while the grandparents attend their classes.
4. Recommends topics to be included in the curriculum presented to grandparents.
5. Considers how to pass on cultural heritage while also creating new traditions.
6. Acquaints newcomer families with services to utilize at school and community.
7. Recruits and trains older adult volunteers to work with teachers in classrooms.
8. Suggests concerns of grandparents for inclusion in parent-education courses.
9. Participates in events that honor the family and school influence of grandparents.
10. Orients visitors to the range of benefits that result from grandparent education.
11. Offers in-service training for teachers focused on grandparents as school partners.
12. Advises grandparents and faculty from other schools about the methods to follow in the formation and operation of grandparent education councils.

### *Make Known Challenges and Concerns of Teenagers*

In many cultures youngsters beyond puberty do not seek advice from their grandparents. Black families are an exception. Teenagers in this population often identify grandmothers as trusted advisors and expect that they will continue as counselors. This means that the influence black grandmothers have is usually sustained for a longer period of time than is common for other populations. Accordingly, it is essential for them to become aware of the difficulties and concerns teenagers have and learn strategies to help them respond to predictable problems. High rates of pregnancy, discipline problems in class, dropout, and trouble with police are of great concern as obstacles to achievement for black adolescents (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2004; Martin et al., 2003; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). However, youth who learn how to set goals, demonstrate a sense of self-direction, show confidence in being able to reject pressure from peers to do things that are not in their best interest, and rely on effective methods to achieve their purposes are likely to succeed. Grandmothers who are able to model self-evaluation and teach problem-solving skills support the acquisition of these healthy attributes.

### *Encourage Further Development of Teaching Strengths*

Three generations assigned grandmothers highly favorable ratings for accessibility to their grandchildren, willingness to listen, the encouragement they provide, readiness to give emotional support, and for offering important nonacademic lessons. Regardless of level of formal education, grandmothers can help facilitate child development through teaching. Even though black grandmothers are perceived as good teachers, they need additional knowledge to more effectively help grandchildren cope with adverse peer attitudes, opinions, and behaviors at school and in the neighborhood. Research has determined that, among working-class people, interest in attending grandparent education classes is greater among blacks (56%) than whites (30%) (Watson & Koblinsky, 1996). This is no surprise since the grandparent role in black families is well defined and recognized as important.

### *Emphasize Discipline that Focuses on Self-evaluation*

In most nuclear families, fathers are expected to assume major responsibility for dealing with misbehavior of children. Because many black families do not have a male head of the household,

females, sometimes assisted by distant male relatives (such as uncles or cousins) must deal with discipline. Whereas white grandmothers might suppose that it is alright to spoil their grandchildren and ignore responsibility for administering discipline, black grandmothers commonly accept the obligation to prevent and correct child behavior as an essential aspect of their role (Watson & Koblinsky, 1996). Given the disproportionate number of black teenage males who have trouble with the law, there is a great need for emphasis on teaching youth to distinguish between right and wrong, obey authority figures, and expect to receive punishment (not warnings) for breaking rules that are understood.

Teaching self-restraint is difficult but necessary, particularly in neighborhoods where children observe impulsive behavior and violence as a way to express differences of opinion. Reliance upon reflective thinking is essential, and grandmothers can have an influence in promoting this change. The link between self-evaluation and self-esteem should also be recognized. Grandparents and parents regret that children are vulnerable to misdirection because they depend too much on peer approval. And yet, so little is done to help children so that they can balance peer opinions with the way they see themselves. When families fail to prepare children to self-evaluate, peers can insist their expectations deserve the highest priority. In the past, communities felt a greater sense of responsibility for monitoring the behavior of everyone. Currently, each person is expected to be responsible for self-evaluation throughout much of life. Unless boys and girls are taught to evaluate themselves by applying growth-oriented criteria and obtaining feedback from mature sources, they cannot become responsible adults.

#### *Provide an Understanding of Creative Thinking*

Oprah Winfrey, Condoleezza Rice, Bill Cosby, and Bernie Mac are famous black celebrities known for their creative thinking. One of the important ingredients of creative thinking is engaging in pretending during childhood. Relying on play as a method for teaching in early childhood is a good way to build respect for imagination as a powerful resource. Black families are sometimes inclined to discourage pretending supposing that such behavior cannot prepare children to deal with the realities of a harsh environment. In contrast, research has found that reliance on fantasy is a valuable defense for coping with conditions of adversity (Taylor, 1999). Pretending offers choices, enables a sense of what is possible, and

motivates the persistence necessary to succeed in the real world. Children should be encouraged to retain the creative abilities that will enable them to generate alternative solutions for many problematic situations they will face.

Creativity originates with imaginary play. Girls and boys get different benefits from playing with peers, playing alone, and playing with caretakers, parents, and grandparents. They also gain from having adults observe them at play and share curiosity and perspectives while watching television together. People who are able to think creatively are more adaptable, can alter roles more readily, and maintain their enthusiasm and zest for life. Creative abilities also stimulate people to look beyond themselves and to show concern for the welfare of future generations (Strom & Strom, 2002).

#### *Offer Ways to Know Each Grandchild as an Individual*

Black children have many situations that their grandmothers did not encounter when they were young. Therefore, conversations should focus on what growing up is like now. Children are the best sources of learning about their own experiences, so they should be expected to do most of the talking. They often want to discuss how friendships can be kept without compromising morality; how to be safe and yet avoid trouble with a gang; and how to handle arguments with teachers and classmates. They also want to explore ways to cope with over-choice and uncertainty in making everyday decisions. Racial prejudice warrants attention because it can have a powerful effect on self-esteem and identity. Grandparents and grandchildren need to share how they deal with unfair treatment from people of other backgrounds.

Black grandmothers communicate easily with grandchildren. However, they could be more successful if they were better informed about the life of individual grandchildren. Girls in this study assigned their grandmothers low scores for not knowing as much as they should about fears and worries of grandchildren, goals they have chosen, stresses they have to manage, attitudes of their peer group, and choices they encounter. The two younger generations agreed that grandmothers overestimate their willingness to admit ignorance; look at things in new ways; learn from granddaughters and daughters; sustain conversation with grandchildren; and discuss controversial issues with an open mind. Grandmothers can acquire these desired attitudes and skills when they are modeled and discussed in their educational program.



Ten curriculum themes for black grandmothers were identified:

1. Enabling grandchildren to establish impulse control and self-discipline.
2. Helping grandchildren to define success, set goals, and evaluate efforts.
3. Knowing challenges that are encountered by children of single parents.
4. Demonstrating constructive ways to resolve differences and disputes.
5. Understanding goals and practices of parents for bringing up children.
6. Collaborating with teachers in school to help prevent student failure.
7. Assigning high priority for child creative thinking and problem solving.
8. Forming durable friendships, respectful dating, and safe-sex practices.
9. Managing a stressful environment and pursuing a healthy lifestyle.
10. Learning from each other while families watch television together.

### *CONCLUSION*

This study assessed grandmother performance as perceived by three generations of black females. Impressions of how grandmothers fulfill their family role were highly favorable. There was remarkable agreement among the generations. When differences were detected, the grandmothers usually rated themselves more favorably than did younger relatives. **It** may be that grandmothers' impressions of how they are doing derive from comparison with memories of the role their own grandmothers played. Recent increases in poverty rates, single-parent families, drug use, and other social problems require that grandmothers today have an even larger role than grandmothers did 30 to 50 years ago. Mothers and daughters, lacking experience and age to make such comparisons, may base their ratings only on current social contexts rather than historical ones. This results in lower ratings for some aspects of grandparent behavior.

Responses of all three generations identified teaching as the greatest strength of black grandmothers. They are seen as effective

instructors of family history and values, religious beliefs, and interpersonal skills. All generations also agreed that grandmothers need to acquire more information about attitudes, goals, and concerns of granddaughters and the challenges they confront. Grandmothers should develop communication skills that will elicit the sharing of feelings by their granddaughters. They need to realize that, while they have much to teach, they must learn from younger relatives as well. This nontraditional approach will allow them to be viewed as models of lifelong learning.

Black children are better able to face increasing challenges when they have access to mature support. Black grandmothers are already providing help that would otherwise overload public-assistance agencies. It has been established that black grandmothers want to learn ways to improve their rate of success. Classes for them should offer curriculum that builds on their strengths and learning needs as identified by three generations.

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