

## **BOOK AND MEDIA REVIEWS**

TOGETHER AGAIN: A CREATIVE GUIDE TO SUCCESSFUL MULTIGENERATIONAL LIVING, by Sharon Graham Niederhaus and John L. Graham. M. Evans (An imprint of the Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group (2007)). C.307 p.illustrations.index. ISBN 10-59077-122-2. Paperback, \$16.95

This book is a particularly valuable resource for those in the field in Intergenerational Relations. The authors (siblings themselves) have combined their expertise to produce a guide for families and professionals who are dealing with multigenerational households, e.g. living in a single home or living nearby. They provide some helpful background and historical perspective since multigenerational living arrangements were so common in earlier times. The authors note research documenting the more than 6 million such living arrangements in the United States and provide an insightful analysis of the rationale as well as issues that must be faced. While some are fairly obvious (such as interior design and remodeling to ensure safety, access, and privacy), others (such as financial and legal considerations) are less obvious and more complex.

The book has received accolades and notoriety in the media through a feature story on ABC Television News "Good Morning America" (04-20-2007) and a special segment in "USA Weekend" magazine (08-26-2007). The focus of these stories has been on the many benefits to young and old living in multigenerational households.

One of the most creative chapters deals with the pairing of younger and older generations to work together towards mutually beneficial common goals. This is the epitome of excellence in intergenerational programming. Rather than viewing the generations in conflict or competing for scarce resources (e.g., generational stake), the authors skillfully emphasize the many benefits that emerge from intergenerational living. The authors are among the first to embrace multigenerational families as a potential positive and significant trend.

Despite their optimism, the authors also recognize the many tensions that can develop in multigenerational households. They identify these challenges so that families and professionals can anticipate the difficulties that may arise. One key to success described in the book is developing a clear and precise "contract" or agreement that spells out the expectations and responsibilities of each member of the multigenerational family. The contract is a dynamic document, subject to change based on agreements by those who participate. However, the real value may lie more in the process of establishing the areas of concern and the identifying potential solutions.

These documents do not avoid all stress and conflict. As the authors note, personality differences and unique family priorities/values may supersede "rational" attempts at mediation and resolution. Knowing first hand the pitfalls of making room for adult children who have completed college, many families will appreciate the sensitivity and understand the structure developed by the authors to bring underlying tensions to the surface. For example, what are appropriate expectations to establish for recent graduates living at home with their parents? Are the tasks that they can assist with similar to those

they undertook at younger ages? Should new expectations emerge such as meal preparation, laundry, shopping, transportation or elder care?

The book is impressive for its recognition of the variety of multigenerational family situations. No one is left out. There is ample attention, of course, on living with aging family members as well as attention on the boomerang generation of young adults moving back to the family nest for financial and emotional reasons. There is recognition of the adult child and grandchildren moving in following divorce as well as the same need among single parents with children who have never married. What is particularly commendable is the emphasis on providing readers with a context in which these changes are occurring. The context can be emotional, historical, economic, sociological, or demographic, but readers are always recognized in these presentations. The authors even anticipate the negative cultural bias in having people of vastly different ages “living together.” The inability to live independently is itself a social stigma that adds significant stress to the multigenerational household.

The writing style is down to earth and easy to understand. The concepts and principles of successful multigenerational families come to life with the many first person accounts from different generations. More than 100 families participated in interviews and shared their individual challenges in negotiating among three generational families. In one section the authors offer schematics of homes for those interested in designing household arrangements for multigenerational living. There is sufficient variety in topic coverage and helpful suggestions that make this book a particularly valuable resource for families facing the challenge of living together with multiple generations. The importance of family dynamics, family structure, and family economics is part of the framework. Ideally families will use this resource *before* establishing multigenerational households.

Readers from any discipline will find great value in this book, particularly those professionals who assist families with the transition to multigenerational living arrangements. In summary this is a practical book that fulfills the promise of its title: “... a creative guide to successful multigenerational living.”

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*Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*  
Volume 6(2), 2008, pages 237-239