

THE CULTURAL GENOGRAM: KEY TO TRAINING CULTURALLY COMPETENT FAMILY THERAPISTS

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Training programs committed to the development of culturally competent family therapists must discover ways to raise cultural awareness and increase cultural sensitivity. While awareness involves gaining knowledge of various cultural groups, sensitivity involves having experiences that challenge individuals to explore their personal cultural issues. This article outlines how the cultural genogram can be used as an effective training tool to promote both cultural awareness and sensitivity.

To meet the demands of a changing world, it will be imperative for family therapy training programs to devote greater attention to preparing culturally competent therapists. Unfortunately, current efforts to prepare culturally competent therapists are skewed heavily toward promoting cultural "awareness" while neglecting the importance of cultural "sensitivity." This occurs primarily through the use of multicultural training models that rely heavily on providing trainees with multicultural content, with far less emphasis upon promoting meaningful multicultural experiences.

Although it is beneficial for trainees to receive exposure to content highlighting the unique aspects of various cultural groups, it is rare that such knowledge readily translates into sensitivity. The content-focused approach to multicultural education overemphasizes the characteristics of various cultural groups while ignoring the importance of the trainees' perceptions of and feelings toward their respective cultural backgrounds. As a result, trainees are rarely challenged to examine how their respective cultural identities influence understanding and acceptance of those who are both culturally similar and dissimilar.

AWARENESS AND SENSITIVITY

Training programs devoted to preparing culturally competent therapists must recognize and attend to the distinction between awareness and sensitivity. Awareness is primarily a cognitive function; an individual becomes conscious of a thought or action and processes it intellectually. Sensitivity, on the other hand, is primarily an affective function; an individual responds emotionally to stimuli with delicacy and respectfulness. Although these

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functions appear unique and separate, each is shaded with nuances of the other. Essentially, awareness involves a conscious sensitivity, and sensitivity involves a delicate awareness.

Although most individuals possess varying degrees of awareness and sensitivity, training programs devoted to preparing culturally competent therapists must facilitate a greater interface between these functions. This article describes how the genogram can be used as a training tool to promote cultural awareness and sensitivity.

Human service professionals from a range of disciplines have cited various clinical applications of the genogram. It has been used to facilitate joining between client and therapist (Carter & Orfandis, 1976; Guerin & Pendagast, 1976; Pendagast & Sherman, 1977) and to gain insight into the client's psyche (Watchel, 1982). Family practitioners have used it as a data-gathering device (Doherty & Baird, 1983; Jolly, Froom, & Rosen, 1980; Milhorn, 1981; Rogers & Durkin, 1984; Sproul & Gallagher, 1982), and family therapists have used it as an assessment tool (Hartman, 1977; Kramer, 1985; McGoldrick & Gerson, 1985).

Although not reflected in the family therapy literature, the genogram also has been used widely as a training tool. Bahr (1990) explains that as a training tool, the objective of the genogram is to help both illustrate and clarify family systems concepts and to help trainees get in touch with their personal emotional family-of-origin issues. Using the genogram for training differs from using it as a clinical tool. As a training tool, "the objective is to help students visualize and *understand* their family system and their own place within it, rather than to change it" (Bahr, 1990, p. 243).

THE CULTURAL GENOGRAM

The primary goal of the cultural genogram is to promote cultural awareness and sensitivity by helping trainees to understand their cultural identities. Through this process, trainees gain greater insight into and appreciation for the ways in which culture impacts their role as therapists and influences the lives of clients in treatment. The cultural genogram is designed to accomplish its primary goal by (a) illustrating and clarifying the influence that culture has on the family system; (b) assisting trainees in identifying the groups which contribute to the formation of their cultural identity; (c) encouraging candid discussions that reveal and challenge culturally based assumptions and stereotypes; (d) assisting trainees in discovering their culturally based emotional triggers (i.e., unresolved culturally based conflicts); and (e) assisting trainees in exploring how their unique cultural identities may impact their therapeutic style and effectiveness.

CULTURE AND ETHNICITY

One of the major conceptual challenges associated with completing a cultural genogram involves understanding the relationship between "culture" and "ethnicity." There is widespread confusion regarding the relationship between these two concepts. Within the family therapy literature, for example, some authors consider culture to be more expansive than ethnicity (Falicov, 1988) while others use them synonymously (McGoldrick, 1985; Preli & Bernard, 1993).

The cultural genogram is based on the assumption that culture and ethnicity are both interrelated and distinct. Culture is a broad multidimensional concept that includes but is not limited to ethnicity, gender, social class, and so forth. Ethnicity, on the other hand,

refers to the group(s) from which an individual has descended and derives the essence of her/his sense of "peoplehood." Therefore, when all of the dimensions that contribute to culture converge (e.g., ethnicity, social class, gender), they form the whole of an individual's cultural identity. It is this whole in which the cultural genogram is ultimately interested.

Culture represents the principal focus of the cultural genogram; however, ethnicity is an integral part of the process and serves as a primary vehicle for promoting understanding of one's cultural identity. Using ethnicity as a means toward understanding culture is an approach used commonly by other educators and trainers of cultural diversity. For instance, Falicov (1988) notes that "one way for trainees to learn to think *culturally* [italics added] is for them to interview a non-clinical family of a distinct *ethnic* [italics added] or socioeconomic group" (p. 339). Thus, ethnicity constitutes a means to an end rather than *the end*.

PREPARING A CULTURAL GENOGRAM

Preparing a cultural genogram requires careful thought and planning. The following section outlines the steps necessary for constructing and presenting a comprehensive cultural genogram.

Getting Organized

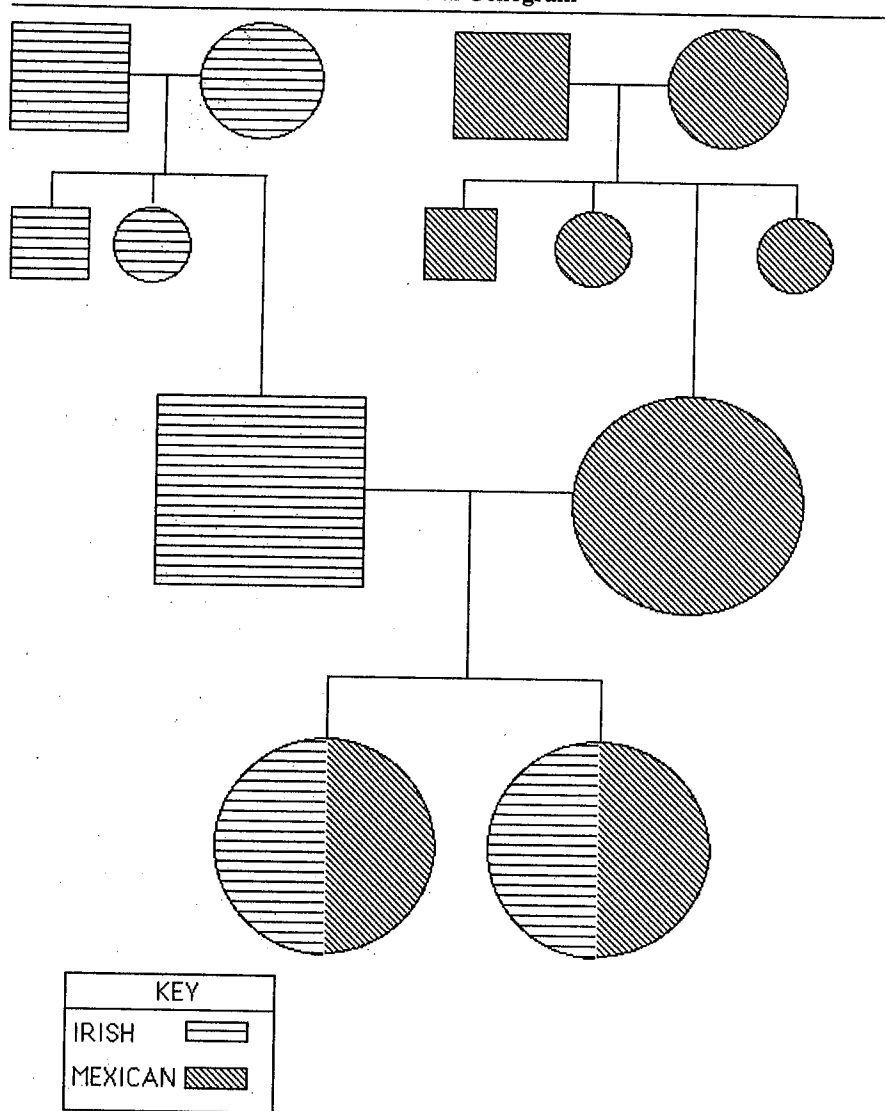
Defining one's culture of origin. The first critical step in preparing a cultural genogram involves defining one's culture of origin. For the purposes of this exercise, culture of origin refers to the major group(s) from which an individual has descended that were the first generation to come to the United States (except for Native Americans). For example, an individual may have been born and raised in America, but if her/his grandparents were Irish and Greek, then the culture of origin consists of these two groups.

Organizing principles and pride/shame issues. The next step in preparing a cultural genogram is identifying the major organizing principles of each group that comprises the trainee's culture of origin. Organizing principles are fundamental constructs which shape the perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors of members of a group. They are the basic structures upon which all other aspects of a culture are predicated. Identifying organizing principles serves to establish a framework, which is an essential step in organizing and constructing an effective cultural genogram presentation.

Trainees also should identify pride/shame issues for each group associated with their culture of origin. Pride/shame issues are aspects of a culture that are sanctioned as distinctively negative or positive. They derive their meaning from organizing principles. Understanding the distinction between organizing principles and pride/shame issues is important. They are similar in that both organize the perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors of group members. However, the critical distinction between the two is that pride/shame issues punctuate behaviors as negative or positive, while organizing principles do not. For instance, in Jewish culture, fear of persecution is an organizing principle, and educational achievement is a pride/shame issue. Although both of these organize Jewish people, educational achievement, unlike fear of persecution, punctuates the individual behavior of Jews as either positive or negative.

Identifying organizing principles and pride/shame issues requires trainees to utilize a variety of sources. These sources may include drawing from one's personal knowledge of a

Figure 1
The Cultural Genogram



group, conducting interviews with members from a particular group, or reviewing reference materials, such as films, books, or cultural artifacts.

Creating symbols. Symbols should be designed by the trainee to denote all pride/shame issues. They should be placed directly on the cultural genogram to depict graphically the prevalence of pride/shame issues and to highlight their impact on family functioning. The use of symbols is a form of analogic communication that allows the presenter to express the

intuitive and affective aspects of cultural issues which are sometimes difficult to capture with words. Essentially, using symbols provides trainees with a means for communicating the nonrational, emotional dimensions of cultural issues which often defy verbal expression.

Selecting colors. A different color should be selected to represent each group comprising a trainee's culture of origin. The colors are used to identify different groups and to depict how each group contributes to the cultural identity of each individual. For instance, if a female is half Swedish (yellow), a quarter Ugandan (red), and a quarter Venezuelan (blue), then the circle that identifies her on the genogram would be color-coded half yellow, a quarter red, and a quarter blue.

The configuration of colors provides a graphic snapshot of the overall cultural composition of the family system and of each individual's unique cultural identity. The initial "color snapshot" inspires a variety of initial hypotheses about the family system and the trainee. For instance, genograms that are dominated by a single color reveal that the family system is characterized by a high degree of cultural homogeneity. On the other hand, genograms which are a collage of colors quickly reveal the multiculturalism of the family system. From these initial observations, numerous questions can be generated to guide further exploration, interpretation, and understanding of the trainees' unique cultural issues and identities.

Identifying intercultural marriages. Intercultural marriages represent a blending of cultures and hence a blending of organizing principles and pride/shame issues. Cultural differences in marriage often have a significant influence on the nature of the relationship and on children. Therefore, in addition to identifying where intercultural marriages occur, trainees should also (a) explore how divergent cultural issues were/are negotiated and (b) trace the intergenerational consequences of the intercultural union. Trainees should use the (~) symbol to denote intercultural marriages.

Putting It Together

Cultural framework charts. Establishing cultural framework charts (CFC) is the next crucial step in the cultural genogram process. The CFC is to the cultural genogram as a legend is to a map. In other words, it provides the keys for interpreting the genogram. A CFC is necessary for each group comprising one's culture of origin. It should list the major organizing principles and the pride/shame issues with their corresponding symbols.

Genogram. The final preparatory step involves constructing at least a three-generation family genogram and adding the following elements to it: the (~) symbol to identify intercultural marriages, colors to illustrate the cultural composition of each person's cultural identity, and the symbols denoting pride/shame issues.

Questions to consider. It is also recommended that trainees answer the questions outlined in Table 1: "Questions to Consider While Preparing for the Presentation." Trainees' familiarity with the answers to these questions can facilitate an informed dialogue about the various sociological factors (e.g., race, religion, regionality, class) that contribute to cultural identity. Through addressing these questions they will be encouraged to appreciate the complexity of cultural identity formation.

Table 1
Questions to Consider While Preparing for the Cultural Genogram Presentation

Please consider these questions for *each* group constituting your culture of origin, as well as considering the implications of the answers in relation to your overall cultural identity.

1. What were the migration patterns of the group?
2. If other than Native American, under what conditions did your family (or their descendants) enter the United States (immigrant, political refugee, slave, etc.)?
3. What were/are the group's experiences with oppression? What were/are the markers of oppression?
4. What issues divide members within the same group? What are the sources of intra-group conflict?
5. Describe the relationship between the group's identity and your national ancestry (if the group is defined in terms of nationality, please skip this question).
6. What significance does race, skin color, and hair play within the group?
7. What is/are the dominant religion(s) of the group? What role does religion and spirituality play in the everyday lives of members of the group?
8. What role does regionality and geography play in the group?
9. How are gender roles defined within the group? How is sexual orientation regarded?
10.
 - a) What prejudices or stereotypes does this group have about itself?
 - b) What prejudices and stereotypes do other groups have about this group?
 - c) What prejudices or stereotypes does this group have about other groups?
11. What role (if any) do names play in the group? Are there rules, mores, or rituals governing the assignment of names?
12. How is social class defined in the group?
13. What occupational roles are valued and devalued by the group?
14. What is the relationship between age and the values of the group?
15. How is family defined in the group?
16. How does this group view outsiders in general and mental health professionals specifically?
17. How have the organizing principles of this group shaped your family and its members? What effect have they had on you?
18. What are the ways in which pride/shame issues of each group are manifested in your family system?
19. What impact will these pride/shame issues have on your work with clients from both similar and dissimilar cultural backgrounds?
20. If more than one group comprises your culture of origin, how were the differences negotiated in your family? What were the intergenerational consequences? How has this impacted you personally and as a therapist?

INTERPRETATION AND PRESENTATION

The cultural genogram presentation should begin with an introduction of the trainee's cultural framework chart(s). This portion of the process is primarily didactic. Trainees introduce, and discuss in detail, organizing principles, pride/shame issues, and the colors and symbols they have selected.

After presenting the cultural framework chart(s), the next step involves using the genogram as a means to illustrate the issues delineated in the chart(s). Essentially, trainees use their genograms to identify and trace the presence or absence of the various pride/shame issues defined on their chart(s). It is recommended that trainees begin exploring the transmission of cultural issues from the oldest generation on their genogram through the subsequent generations. This portion of the process is primarily experiential and involves considerable interaction and discussion.

SYNTHESIS

The cultural genogram experience should culminate in an analysis of a trainee's cultural background, highlighting how it shapes her/his cultural identity and impacts her/his role as a therapist. The synthesis stage enables trainees to reflect upon, further explore, and integrate the various aspects of the entire process. It is during this stage that trainees are encouraged to think critically about themselves as cultural beings. They should be challenged to describe and analyze at least one critical incident from each stage of the cultural genogram process (i.e., "Getting Organized," "Putting It All Together," etc.).

There are two basic tasks associated with this stage. The first is retrospective self-reflection, which encourages trainees to ponder the impact of the cultural genogram process *ex post facto*. The central question germane to successful completion of this task is "now that it's over, what did I learn from it?" The second task is integration, which involves inspiring trainees to search for the goodness of fit between thoughts and feelings, content and process, and their personal and professional identities, as each of these has been shaped by the cultural genogram process. It is through completion of these interrelated tasks that trainees incorporate what they have gained from the exercise into their clinical work.

The synthesis process occurs over an extensive period of time. However, it may be necessary and even desirable for trainers to establish artificial benchmarks to represent a point of closure for the cultural genogram process. Thus, the synthesis stage, as described here, is a ritual which symbolizes an end to the cultural genogram process and the beginning of an ongoing process of cultural self-exploration and integration.

THE ROLE OF THE FACILITATOR

The facilitator assumes a crucial role in the overall success of the cultural genogram experience. It is necessary for the facilitator to support the trainees emotionally during this self-exploratory process while remaining detached enough to challenge them intellectually. As with any experience of this type, successful execution of the facilitator's role is largely dependent on the extent to which her/his emotional involvement in the overall process is managed effectively. It is only through achieving an appropriate balance between engagement and disengagement that the facilitator can create the emotional climate necessary to

Table 2
Questions to Answer in Synthesis Paper

1. What are your family's beliefs and feelings about the group(s) that comprise your culture of origin? What parts of the group(s) do they embrace or reject? How has this influenced your feelings about your cultural identity?
2. What aspects of your culture of origin do you have the most comfort "owning," the most difficulty "owning"?
3. What groups will you have the easiest time working with, the most difficult?
4. What did you learn about yourself and your cultural identity? How might this influence your tendencies as a therapist?
5. Was the exercise valuable, worthwhile? Why or why not?

stimulate emotional sharing and intellectual exploration.

An effective facilitator (a) clarifies the goals of the exercise and evaluates trainees' attainment of the goals; (b) determines what factors impeded or stimulated trainees' abilities to accomplish their goals; (c) demonstrates sensitivity to and respect for differences and the numerous ways in which differences are manifested, for example, how trainees learn and process information; (d) takes an active role in creating a milieu that promotes emotional safety and risk taking; (e) encourages trainees to challenge respectfully racial, ethnic, and ultimately cultural stereotypes and biases; and (f) demonstrates a tolerance for and an ability to manage escalating levels of anxiety, anger, and fear.

Because of the hypersensitivity that often characterizes cross-cultural interactions, it is important for the facilitator to remain comfortable with and even encourage interactions that often result in increased anxiety, fear, and frustration. The facilitator's overt display of comfort (or lack thereof) becomes either the catalyst for, or impediment to, heightened risk taking, meaningful sharing, and cultural sensitivity. Since trainees are often hesitant to discuss cultural differences openly for fear of "saying the wrong thing," the facilitator must assume the interrelated roles of interaction catalyst and broker of permission. It is primarily through these roles that trainees will be inspired and challenged to gain the essence of the cultural genogram process.

Table 3 outlines sample questions facilitators might ask to help guide the cultural genogram presentations and related discussions.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TREATMENT AND RESEARCH

Clinical Implications

Several family therapists (Hardy, 1990; Lappin, 1983) have emphasized the importance of therapists knowing their respective cultures before attempting to work cross-culturally. Lappin (1983) asserts that "knowing thy own culture is perhaps the most difficult aspect of conducting effective cross cultural therapy" (p. 135). To facilitate this process, Lappin recommended that the first step one must take is to develop a three-generational cultural genogram.

The cultural genogram not only helps therapists become more conversant with their cultural identities but also highlights culturally linked issues that may impede effec-

Table 3
Questions for Facilitators to Consider During the Presentation

1. a) What does the content of the presentation teach about the presenter's culture of origin?
 b) What does the process of the presentation teach about the presenter's culture of origin?
 c) What parallels, if any, exist between the presenter's style and the cultural content disclosed?
2. Are family-of-origin and culture-of-origin issues appropriately differentiated?
3. Do the colors and symbols chosen by the presenter have special cultural relevance? How were these chosen?
4. Is there a disproportionate number of pride or shame issues? What is the presenter's rationale for the schism?
5. When there are multiple groups comprising a trainee's culture of origin, how are they presented/negotiated?
6. How comfortable is the presenter in engaging in an open dialogue about inter- and/or intragroup prejudices and stereotypes?
7. What issues appear too uncomfortable for the presenter to discuss?
8. What impact did the presentation have on other trainees? What are the hypotheses regarding why such reactions were generated?
9. What relevance or insights did the presenter have as a result of this experience?
10. What was the process by which the information for the cultural genogram was gathered?

tive treatment. The didactic portion of the cultural genogram provides valuable contextual information about specific groups that can be beneficial in treatment. This is particularly true of groups with whom the therapist has had no previous contact. Rather than using the information as the basis for perpetuating stereotypes, it allows therapists to generate culturally based hypotheses that can help shape the course of treatment.

The presentations and discussions associated with the cultural genogram are valuable and have strong implications for clinical practice. The exercise can be instrumental in assisting therapists to identify unresolved culturally based issues. Resolution of these issues allows therapists to work more effectively cross-culturally, as well as with clients who are culturally similar.

Culturally unresolved therapists experience considerable difficulty demonstrating sensitivity to clients from similar and dissimilar backgrounds. For example, a therapist of Brazilian descent who rejects her/his heritage may find it difficult to work with Brazilian clients. This therapist may either express inappropriate affect toward any aspect of the client's background that appears unequivocally Brazilian, or efforts may be made to coerce the client indirectly to embrace her/his heritage more fully. In either case, it is the therapist's unresolved cultural issues that become a major organizing principle in treatment.

The cultural genogram experience also helps to shape the worldview of therapists.

Rather than embracing the theoretical myth of sameness (the belief that all families are the same), therapists develop a genuine appreciation of and respect for the differences that exist between and among families. It is through this process therapists learn, for example, that there are some families for whom Saturday is not an appropriate day for therapy appointments or for whom it does make a difference whether they are thought of as Puerto Rican or Hispanic.

Research Implications

McGoldrick and Gerson (1985) and Lewis (1989) have emphasized the need for more empirical research on the genogram. The cultural genogram could benefit from empirical inquiry regarding its effectiveness. Outcome data gathered from training and clinical settings could enhance reliability and validity of the cultural genogram as an effective training tool for promoting culturally competent family therapists.

As family therapy programs continue to struggle with how to integrate multiculturalism into their curricula, data obtained from the cultural genogram could serve as a useful guide. The cultural genogram could be used as an instrument to collect aggregate data from training programs to highlight implications for how multiculturalism might (or might not) be incorporated into MFT curricula. Programs would have not only a wealth of rich trainee data to draw upon but also a variety of experiences with a myriad of teaching methodologies.

The cultural genogram, although conceived of as a training tool, may have some clinical applicability as well. Future research may determine that the instrument can be modified to use clinically in two significant ways: (a) as a basis for collecting/analyzing therapists' cultural competence in cross-cultural family therapy and (b) as an assessment instrument in working with cross-cultural families where the blending of cultural issues is the presenting problem or related to it.

The need and implications for further research are enormous. Questions regarding the specifics of such research should remain part of an open and continuing dialogue.

REFLECTIONS ON THE CULTURAL GENOGRAM

The cultural genogram is a practical instrument for assisting trainees in becoming more familiar with their culturally constructed realities. The process of developing, using, and refining the instrument has assisted the authors in this goal as well. The cultural genogram has been instrumental in heightening our awareness of our cultural biases and the numerous ways in which these are deeply embedded in the cultural genogram process. Thus, we wish to admonish trainers and trainees that the instrument and recommended process are only as objective as our cultural lenses would permit us to be. Everything we have described, recommended, or chosen to include or ignore has been "tarnished" by our Westernized view of the world.

For example, a Hindu trainee from Southern India pointed out the cultural bias ingrained in our assumption that a complete family system can be mapped out in a single two-dimensional diagram. She explained that in her culture, the definition of family is much more expansive than in Western society. In constructing her cultural genogram, she was forced by the limitations of the standardized genogram format to leave out many individuals who were significant in defining her cultural context and identity. As an example of how large familial networks are in her culture, she explained that 900 relatives attended her sister's wedding, and her mother and sisters personally wrote thank-you notes to all of them.

Another one of our assumptions is that trainees will have knowledge of the groups from which they have descended. However, many trainees of African American descent, for example, may experience difficulty tracing their roots as a result of the historical legacy of slavery.

Another cultural bias has to do with our conceptualization of marriage. The cultural genogram asks trainees to identify intercultural marriages, but the term *marriage* is ambiguous. In Western cultures, marriage refers to a legally sanctioned union, but in other cultures the definition of marriage (and of legal) varies. The failure to make this distinction constitutes a bias.

These brief descriptions highlight the caution that should be exercised before attempting to fit "a square peg in a round hole," an attempt that characterizes most cross-cultural interactions. It is our hope that the cultural genogram, despite its cultural biases, will assist trainees and trainers alike in better knowing what it is they do not know. We believe that this process will contribute to the development of future generations of family therapists who will possess the cultural awareness and sensitivity necessary to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse clinical population.

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