

Genogram Paper

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The Murray Bowen family systems theory views the family as a whole unit and the genogram was created as part of the modality. Genograms are used in sessions to help with assessing the family's norms, their expectations, how the family communication and interaction, how they make life decisions and deal with stressors. Creating a family map was a rather interesting way to learn about my family systems, relationships and their interaction with each other. It gave me a visual presentation of conflicts, traits, and personalities that exist in my family systems. In some sense, the genogram helped to shed some light as to why I behave the way I do and helped me to discover the conflicts and traits that may have existed in my family system.

According to Browning and Hull:

The genogram, or family map, has been a cornerstone of family systems treatment since Bowen articulated the integration of the family map into his comprehensive model. A parsimonious genogram is valuable because so much information is gathered in the assessment process. The primary value of the genogram is to provide the therapist with a visual representation of the multigenerational emotional processes taking place in the family. (p. 568)

This paper summarizes three generations of the Jaigobins' and Harnaths' families, illustrating relationships, traditions, religions, health patters, etc. Growing up in a collectivist culture, I found this assignment to be a little difficult. My family does not talk about feelings or emotions. They tend to hide the deepest darkest secrets, and no one asks or speak about them. I got my information from my dad and my mom. Surprisingly, it was easier to gather information from my dad than from my mom. While putting this genogram together, I realized that there were conflicts on both sides of my family, which led to the way we interacted, in regard to relationships and emotional attachments. This also led to the realization that the genogram visualized both nurture and nature.

While drawing this genogram, it became more obvious that conflicts exist in different

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parts of my family systems. One important part of the genogram was the cultural aspect of religion. Having a visual picture helped me to see that all the of the Jaigobins' family practice Hinduism, except my dad, who is Christian. On the other hand, the Harnaths' family are all Christians. My dad was able to tell the story of how he and my mom accepted Jesus when I was two years old. In Hinduism, believers are expected to be born and die within the culture/religion. Denying Hinduism and accepting Christianity led to my dad and our family being emotionally cut off from the Jaigobin's family. For many years, my dads' family did not speak to him because he was now Christian. This religious difference created a lot of tensions/conflicts within the family, especially because my dad was the favorite among his siblings. Even though his parents wanted to speak to him, it created conflicts because his siblings wanted nothing to do with him. This led to our family being emotionally cutoff for a few years.

While creating this genogram, it became apparent that there was a pattern of illness-related deaths. The leading cause of most family member's death was heart failure. At least 5 members have died from heart attacks. Other illness-related deaths include stoke, alzheimer, diabetes, high blood pressure and lung disease caused by alcoholism. When it comes to mental illness, there is one case on my mother's side of the family. My uncle who is a pastor was diagnosed with depression. He spent most of his early 30's seeking mental health treatments.

Visually looking at the genogram, the interaction/relationship among family members seemed friendly. However, there were a few exceptions. Alcoholism seemed to be a leading cause of many conflicts within various families. On my dad's side, alcoholism led to divorce, deaths, emotional cut off and domestic violence. On my mom's side, alcoholism led to divorce, deaths and emotional cutoff. Until his death, my mom's brother was emotionally cutoff from the family due to his alcoholic habits. He lost his family because of his habits and whenever there

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was an attempt to help, he often refused or lash out to the family member who wanted to help. My uncles' behaviors affected the communication among the current generation and his habits seemed to have spilled over into the next generation.

As mentioned in an earlier paragraph, family issues are considered intimate, and never gets told to members outside of the family structure. Things that were considered intimate or hidden from "outsiders" were mental illnesses, abuses, and even abortion or miscarriages. Looking at the genogram, one can see the patterns of emotional abuse, between mother and child. For example, my mom was emotionally abused by her mother. My sister and I were both emotionally abused by our mother until we were able to leave the house in marriage since females are not allowed to move out until they are married.

The themes and patterns following three generations can spill over to the fourth generation. However, it is up to the fourth generation to distinguish the maladaptive behaviors from culturally embedded behaviors. Poverty affected both sides of my family to attain a proper education, leaving most of them to quit school and finding jobs to take care of the family. I noticed that my aunts and uncles did not finish school on either side of my family. My dad was the only one to finish high school with distinctions but could not attend college because he had to work to take care of his parents and siblings. However, a few of my cousins, my sister and I were able to degrees and are able to differentiate between culturally embedded habits from maladaptive behaviors.

As a therapist working with this family, I can already see that this family is a collectivist family, who wants to keep everything within the family systems. However, as the therapist, I would do a few psycho-education sessions with this family, teaching them the importance of talking about feelings and emotions. I would explore client relationship with mom, especially

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since there were/are emotional abuse involved. I wondered about emotional cutoff and would explore that with mom and client. I would explore how the client might view her relationship in spite of being emotionally abused all her life, leading up to her marriage. As the therapist looking at the genogram, I noticed the health concerns with both parents. I would ask about possible caregivers.

I would explore client feelings towards her mom and dad.

According to Tsveli and Diamond:

Adults often present for therapy with unresolved anger toward one or both of their parents. In some cases, the anger stems from the feeling that their parents do not sufficiently care about them. In other instances, it stems from not feeling valued or appreciated. In yet other cases, the anger stems from boundary violations and/or parental psychological control. When such anger lingers for years, the very integrity of the relationship is threatened. (p. 289)

I would want to explore client feelings especially surrounding the emotional abuse suffered. How has it impacted her, explore challenges and how might it manifest in her marriage or her own family structure. Tsveli and Diamond (2018), "One treatment that has been found helpful for helping adults resolve their anger is attachment-based family therapy" (p.289).

As a therapist, I would utilize the Bowen's theory of understanding emotional cut-off, differentiation of self and triangles. Looking at the visual representation, I noticed that the relationships between the mother and father are indifferent, which led me to explore possible triangulation patterns between the client, her sister, and their dad. Client emotional abuse may have somewhat ended after her marriages, but I would explore her sense of self and her state of acceptance. I would work with the mother as well, exploring her relationship with her mother, checking for a pattern of abuse as well. Heintzelman et al. (2014), "Differentiation of self from the family of origin, a construct originating in Bowen family system theory is a relationship variable that may provide an understanding of interpersonal functioning" (p. 15). I would

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continue to work with family using the Bowenian approach of increasing each member's level of differentiation.

This paper identified some of the themes that run through three generations of my family. I was able to discover and explore some of the family dynamics that affect me. This genogram paper allowed me to place myself as the client while trying to identify themes and possible interventions. It depicts the family dynamics that run throughout my family's history. Being a therapist, it is important to understand a client's or a family's dynamics, and how it might affect the client or family unit as a whole.

Reference

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