



# Using Community Genograms to Position Culture and Context in Family Therapy

## Chapter 2

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# The Community Genogram

## Introduction

- Family counselors view issues of health, distress, and disorder from an ecosystemic perspective that encompasses individuals as they develop within families that reside within intercultural communities.
- Individuals, families, and communities are seen both as unique systems and as participants in wider interactive systems.



# The Community Genogram

## Introduction

- The *community genogram* is a graphic interactive assessment and treatment device used by counselors and clients to collaboratively explore cultural and contextual factors that have contributed and are contributing to the difficulties prompting treatment.
- By using community genograms, counselors and clients can examine how difficulties develop over time and across contexts and can identify and activate relevant individual, family, and community resources.



# The Community Genogram

## Making the Invisible Visible: The Evolution of Genograms

- Bowen introduced the *family diagram* in the late 1950s, a method for visually arranging information about extended family systems over several generations to demonstrate relational patterns and emotional processes for objective review and examination.
- Over a decade later, the term *genogram* was introduced.



## The Community Genogram

### Making the Invisible Visible: The Evolution of Genograms

- The most recognized among these is the *family genogram*, which provided guidelines for constructing three-generational graphics in ways that enabled counselors and clients to examine patterns and worldviews transmitted from one generation to the next.



# The Community Genogram

## Family Genograms

- McGoldrick and Gerson (1985) introduced guidelines for conducting family genogram interviews, along with a set of symbols (see Figure 2.1 in your book) for visually arranging the information gathered from the family.
- The resultant family genogram could be used to illustrate how interactional patterns, emotional processes, and dominant themes take form, transmit, and replicate over at least three generations of an extended family system.



# The Community Genogram

## Family Genograms

- The basic elements of a family genogram consist of information about the structure of the family and about relevant emotional processes and themes as depicted by the *index person* (i.e., the person from whose perspective the genogram is constructed).



# The Community Genogram

## Family Genograms

Information gathered typically includes:

- Family demographics
- Biological, legal, and social connections
- Significant life events and stressors
- Emotional relationships among family members.



# The Community Genogram

## Eco-Maps

- Hartman, a social worker and family counselor, developed eco-maps as a method for diagramming the ecological system of a family.
- This diagram provides holistic insight into ways to coordinate services and resources for clients.



# The Community Genogram

## Eco-Maps

Using genograms and other diagrammatic symbols, eco-maps illustrate:

- The current composition and structure of a family.
- The outside systems surrounding a family and the degree of influence each system has with respect to client difficulties.
- The nature and type of connections between relevant systems and the family as a whole or specific family members.
- The nature and type of connections occurring across the network of systems involved with the family.



# The Community Genogram

## Cultural Genograms

- As cultural experiences and values affect worldviews, attitudes, and behaviors multidimensionally, it is essential to understand the multiple aspects of clients' sociocultural identities.
- Cultural genograms: (a) illustrate how various aspects of culture influence families; and (b) help trainees explore how various aspects of their cultural identities inform their therapeutic style and effectiveness.



# The Community Genogram

## Genogram Variations

- Efforts have been made to modify family genograms to account for larger cultural contexts and to consider how factors such as gender, ethnicity, and power contribute to the emergence, definition, and management of client difficulties.
- For example, there are genograms that consider wider systems, target underserved populations and specific clinical issues, explore the intersectionality of multiple sociocultural identities across various contexts, and incorporate theoretical advances into therapeutic approaches.



# The Community Genogram

## Community Genograms

- Community genograms widen the scope of assessment and the territory of intervention by expanding the understanding of clients within social and historical contexts.
- Such examinations provide a multidimensional, nonpathological, and contextually contingent portrayal of the wider contexts within which client difficulties are embedded that can reveal paths within the wider terrain that can be navigated to address these difficulties.



# The Community Genogram

## Community Genograms

Examining a graphic of this wider terrain makes it possible to identify:

- Relevant cultural and contextual factors that influence how clients come to understand and participate in their current communities.
- Factors now serving to constrain or enhance effective functioning across the multiple life-spaces within which clients reside.
- Positive strengths and resources existing within these wider terrains.



# The Community Genogram

## Community Genograms

These expanded visions also reveal issues directly related to:

- A client's sense-of-self, self-in-relation, and self-in-context.
- Intra- and extrafamilial alliances and affiliations.
- Community and cultural resources.
- Developmental and contextual histories.



# The Community Genogram

**Human and System Development in Context:**

**An Ecosystemic Perspective**

- The theory undergirding community genograms assumes that human and systemic development is best understood within a biopsychosocial / ecological framework comprised of a full spectrum of factors, from genetically determined processes to overarching cultural constructions.



# The Community Genogram

**Human and System Development in Context:**

## **An Ecosystemic Perspective**

- The theory holds that individuals are embedded within *family systems*, which, in turn, are embedded in *local communities* positioned within geopolitical *societal structures* that are impacted by overarching *cultural constructions*.



# The Community Genogram

## Basic Components of Standard Community Genograms

The standard community genogram takes the form of a *star diagram* that arranges information about:

- Clients
- Influential family members and subsystems
- Significant others and groups
- Major cultural and community systems and events
- Particular client experiences within an ecosystemic framework



# The Community Genogram

## Basic Components of Standard Community Genograms

- The star diagram illustrates the predominant culture and society clients reside within or others they have previously navigated at significant points over the course of their lifespan.
- Clients are positioned at the center of the star.
- The *embayments* surrounding the star comprise contexts deemed relevant by clients.



# The Community Genogram

## Basic Components of Standard Community Genograms

- The shape of each embayment illustrates how clients perceive the significance of each context.
- Others participating in these wider contexts who are significant to clients are situated at the end points of the star.



# The Community Genogram

## Basic Components of Standard Community Genograms

- The *channels* connecting them are depicted as broad, narrow, or closed off to illustrate how clients perceive the nature and scope of their exchange.
- Together, embayments and channels demonstrate how clients are uniquely positioned within wider contexts and the ways in which they navigate these contexts.



# The Community Genogram

## Relational Star Diagrams

- These are used with individuals who, together, form a relational system (e.g., partners, families, therapeutic relationships).
- Members belonging to the relational system are first represented within their own individual star diagram.



# The Community Genogram

## Relational Star Diagrams

These individual stars are then brought together in a graphic that illustrates how members identify:

- The relevant contexts and significant others that comprise their relational system.
- The relevant contexts and significant others that, while contributing to a member's sense of self, are not directly contained within the relational system.
- The contexts that are relevant to both members in different ways and through different affiliations.



# The Community Genogram

## Using Community Genograms to Extend Client Perspectives

- Community genograms provide a method and format for counselors and clients to consider ways in which cultural and contextual factors have contributed and are contributing to the difficulties prompting therapy.
- The fundamental goal is to introduce a wider context that facilitates a shift in clients' perceptions of themselves as encapsulated identified patients to people who are experiencing difficulties that are inextricably intertwined with forces in their wider sociocultural environment.



# The Community Genogram

## Using Community Genograms to Extend Client Perspectives

- Doing so strengthens their sense of self in relation and extends their focus to include resources in their wider environment.
- Community genograms portray vast amounts of client information in a concise, usable, and personalized format that serves as a common point of reference for counselors and clients to carefully consider issues generally not positioned in the foreground of family treatment.



# The Community Genogram

## Using Community Genograms to Extend Client Perspectives

How to use a community genogram:

- Phase One: Orientation
- Phase Two: Constructing Community Genograms
- Phase Three: Positive Asset Search
- Phase Four: Expressing the Negative Stories
- Phase Five: Promoting Reflective Consciousness



# The Community Genogram

## Using Community Genograms as Consultants and Advocates

- To provide effective and relevant services in these broader contexts, family counselors must have a strong knowledge base about the multiple definitions of culture and a deep understanding about how culture impacts all members of the organization.
- How individuals develop their cultural identities within the organization will require that the consultant and the advocate pay attention to shifts in relationships within and across groups, especially the interactions between the dominant-subordinate groups.



# The Community Genogram

## Extending the Boundaries of the Therapeutic Exchange

- Both the counselor and the client bring their individual and collective heritages and contextual influences into the immediacy of the therapeutic exchange.
- Counselors, therefore, need to be sensitive to the exchange of cultures and the effects of sociocultural and institutional biases on therapy.



# The Community Genogram

## Extending the Boundaries of the Therapeutic Exchange

- These biases, over time, impact how we individually and collectively experience, interpret, and react to our work.
- Counselors need to consider what is not being discussed in session that may offer untapped resources for the client. The community genogram process can help counselors and clients think beyond the four walls of the treatment office.