Spiritual Genograms: A Generational Approach to Assessing Spirituality

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Abstract

Clients' spiritual and religious beliefs are often significantly shaped by family influences, particularly among many minority populations. Spiritual genograms offer an assessment method that highlights the spiritual and religious strengths that may exist within clients' families and depicts how these multi-generational dynamics inform current spiritual functioning. Information is provided on how to construct a spiritual genogram, as well as how to conduct an assessment, elicit spiritual strengths, and shift toward planning interventions. A case study is delineated, a number of spiritually-based interventions that flow from the instrument are reviewed, and sample questions are provided. The paper concludes by offering a number of suggestions as to when spiritual genograms may be particularly applicable.

THERE IS INCREASING COGNIZANCE among helping professionals that, for many clients, spirituality is a fundamental dimension of personal ontology, particularly among disadvantaged populations such as African Americans, Hispanics, women, the elderly, and the poor (Gallup & Lindsay, 1999; Pargament, 1997; Walsh, 1999b). Religion, past and present, may affect attitudes and practices regarding animals, child care, diet, medical care, mental health, military participation, recreation, schooling and many other areas of significance to social workers (Rey, 1997). Additionally, a growing body of empirical research has associated spirituality and religion with a wide array of salutary characteristics (Ellison & Levin, 1998; Gartner, 1996; Hodge, 2000b). In short, for many individuals, spirituality is a significant strength.

With the recognition of spirituality and religion's salience, there has been increased interest in spiritual assessment and marshaling spiritual strengths to ameliorate problems (Bullis, 1996; Canda & Furman, 1999; Sherwood, 1998). Yet, as Doherty (1999) notes, in much of the current literature, the emphasis is primarily individualistic. Historically oriented environmental factors are de-emphasized. Due to the emphasis upon the isolated person, the implicit message is communicated that external, community based influences are extraneous (Doherty, 1999).

Yet, in keeping with systems theory, there are a number of reasons for adopting a more generational approach for spiritual assessment. Wuthnow's (1999) ethnographic study (N = 200) on religious perceptions led him to conclude that there are at least three important generational aspects involved in the transmission of spiritual and religious values. First, there is the direct influence that grandparents have with their children and grandchildren in settings where several generations live together in the same household. Second, in situations in which grandparents do not live in the household, they indirectly shape perceptions through the memories they evoke, especially in cases where at least one of the grandparents was noted for piety. Finally, gender differences are also relevant since it is frequently mothers and grandmothers who play a decisive role in childhood religious experiences.

In most cases, families are successful in passing on their values and beliefs. Bengtson and Harootyan's (1994) nationally representative study (N = 1,500) on intergenerational linkages found that most respondents felt their opinions were either

"similar" or "very similar" to those of their parents. Likewise, a 24-year follow-up study (N = 206) of religious behaviors and attitudes found that 68% of respondents still self-identified as members of their original denomination (O'Connor, Alexander, Hodge, Parikh, & Grunder,1999).

Conversely, spiritually related issues can be a source of intergenerational conflict. An analysis by Clarke, Preston, Raksin and Bengtson (1999) of the Longitudinal Study of Generations data file (N = 1,137) found that "religious beliefs were often mentioned as areas of conflict" (p. 267). An adult child may, for example, experience a spiritual awakening, leave her parents' denomination that was perceived to be spiritually lifeless, and join a new denomination that is perceived to be more spiritually alive.

To summarize, while the individualistic perspective makes a consequential contribution to the literature; it is also important to acknowledge that each person is imbedded in a particular family structure. Family of origin continues to inform beliefs and experiences, regardless of whether individuals negotiate a place for themselves within their family's tradition or exercise their right to convert to another faith tradition. Thus, it is important to develop generationally-based assessment procedures that are more congruent with the person-in-environment approach that has traditionally informed social work. A modified version of the traditional genogram would seem to present an ideal vehicle for this task. Traditional genograms are widely used and have been adapted to serve a number of discrete uses (McGoldrick, Gerson & Shellenberger, 1999).

Accordingly, this paper orients readers to spiritual genograms, an assessment instrument specifically designed to identify and operationalize the spiritual and religious strengths that exist in clients' family systems. After defining spirituality and religion, information is provided on how to construct a spiritual genogram and conduct an assessment. A number of interventions that flow from the spiritual genogram are overviewed and the paper concludes with a number of suggestions for the instrument's use.

Spirituality and Religion

Spirituality and religion are commonly conceptualized as overlapping but distinct constructs (Canda, 1997; Carroll, 1997). For the purposes of this paper, spirituality refers to an individual's relationship with God (or perceived transcendence), while religion is defined as a particular set of beliefs, practices, and rituals that have been developed in community by people who share similar existential experiences of transcendent reality (Hodge, 2000a).

Religion is defined inclusively to incorporate forms outside traditional denominational structures. As Pargament (1997) observes, New Age groups and other alternative expressions of spirituality inevitably take on the forms of religion. In short, religion is essentially the organized communal expression of individual spirituality. As noted above, both spiritual and religious dimensions frequently play a role in the immediate family system through intergenerational interactions.

Spiritual Genograms: Philosophy and Construction

Genograms were specifically developed to provide practitioners with a blueprint of intergenerational interactions (McGoldrick, et al., 1999). Through the use of what is essentially a modified diagrammatic family tree, they help both practitioners and clients understand the flow of historically rooted patterns through time. In a manner analogous to traditional genograms, spiritual genograms provide social workers with a tangible graphic representation of complex expressions of spirituality over three generations.

While the philosophical underpinnings of traditional genograms are somewhat nebulous (Lewis, 1989), spiritual genograms are informed by what Hoyt (1998) refers to as the constructivist perspective, a collection of postmodern approaches that share a number of underlying assumptions regarding the client/practitioner relationship. More specifically, the constructivist's perspective holds that individuals construct their reality based upon interactions with significant others, both transcendent and temporal (Spero, 1990). Clients are considered to have wisdom and strengths, and consequently, therapeutic goals are co-constructed with an emphasis upon using clients' assets to overcome problems. Traditional hierarchical relationships which privilege practitioners' status are de-emphasized in favor of egalitarian alliances marked by empathic respect for divergent constructions of reality, and a belief in the

power of the therapeutic dialogue to foster empowering narratives (Hoyt, 1998). These assumptions animate the assessment process discussed below from the construction of spiritual genograms to the selection of interventions.

Charting the Family

The first step in constructing a spiritual genogram is to delineate the basic family structure over three generations (Frame, 2000a). Grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, siblings, nieces and nephews are depicted, along with significant dates, such as births, marriages, divorces, remarriages, and deaths, as in a typical genogram. Some practitioners may also find it helpful to symbolize the quality of the relationships, noting conflict, closeness, distance, etc. McGoldrick, Gerson and Shellenberger (1999) and Stanion, Papadopoulos and Bor (1997) provide, respectively, book- and article-length overviews of basic genogram construction.

Family members, however, are not the only actors in a client's spiritual history. Indeed, many religious traditions conceptualize themselves as a form of spiritual, as opposed to biological, family. Consequently, there may be distantly related or even unrelated individuals who have played a role of spiritual import equal to any person in the client's immediate constellation of relatives over the course of time (Hardy & Laszloffy, 1995).

These individuals can also be listed on the spiritual genogram (Bullis, 1990). Thus, to supplement the traditional squares representing males and circles denoting females, triangles can be used to designate individuals who have played major spiritual roles but are not members of the immediate biological family.

Color Coding Denominational Affiliation and Religious Preference

Drawing pencils of various hues can be used to indicate clients' spiritual orientation, their spiritual and religious beliefs or spiritual cosmology, on the basic genogram (Lewis, 1989). Color coding is used to provide a graphic "color snapshot" of the overall spiritual composition of clients' families, which in turn suggests a variety of initial hypotheses about clients' present spiritual reality (Hardy & Laszloffy, 1995). For example, a couple's spiritual genogram that consists of a single color on one side and is multicolored on the other, can illustrate contrasting spiritual orientations immediately.

More specifically, the square representing a grandfather who was a devout Southern Baptist could be colored red while the circle depicting his wife, a member of the Assemblies of God, might be colored orange. Similarly, a son who is a Muslim might be colored brown and his Roman Catholic wife green. Other colors can be used to mark different denominational affiliations or religious preference (e.g., Presbyterian-blue, New Age-purple, Atheist/secular-black, etc.). If denominational affiliation and religious preference is unknown, then no color is used.

A person who converts to another religious tradition or decides to change denominational affiliations can be depicted by marking in the appropriate color in a circle around the outside of the figure representing the person. The date of the change should also be listed on the genogram beside the symbol in brackets. This provides an indication of the stability or fluidity of affiliation over time (Frame, 2000b).

The line connecting the parents to the children can be color coded based upon the denomination or religious tradition in which the children were raised. Additional colors can be employed if changes occurred during childhood. Building on the above example, a son that was raised in the Islamic tradition until the death of his father at age 10 and was subsequently raised Catholic would have a brown line that changes into a green line running from the parents to the child. The date of the change at age 10 could be recorded on the spiritual genogram at the point where the line changes color from brown to green.

The Limitations of Affiliation

While most clients are affiliated with a particular denomination (Gallup & Lindsay, 1999), and remain in their family of origin's denominational affiliation (O'Connor, et al., 1999; Gallup & Lindsay, 1999), there is growing realization that denominational affiliations are often inaccurate indicators of adherents' beliefs (Clydesdale, 1999). Due to what Hunter (1991) refers to as an epistemologically-based religious restructuring, it is important to note that denominational affiliations, and even religious preference to some extent, are growing less significant as indictors of personal spiritual orientation (Hoffmann & Miller, 1998; Sullins, 1999).

As Hunter (1991) observes, many denominations incorporate both orthodox believers, who af-

firm a transcendent timeless understanding of truth, and progressive adherents, who believe that truth is an evolving entity dictated by the spirit of the present age. Thus, denominations are frequently split to some extent along epistemological lines, with some churches affirming an orthodox or conservative understanding of truth while others hold a progressive or liberal view. Put differently, due to differences in epistemology, clients can express their spirituality in radically different manners even when members of the same denomination.

An Evangelical United Methodist, a charismatic Episcopalian and a traditional Catholic may have more in common with each other than members of their own denominations.

As a result of this religious restructuring, epistemology rather than denomination is becoming an increasingly salient marker of one's metaphysical worldview. Due to what Hunter (1991) calls an ecumenism of orthodoxy, an Evangelical United Methodist, a charismatic Episcopalian and a traditional Catholic may have more in common with each other than members of their own denominations, in spite of their rather significant theological differences that might have hindered relationships in past generations. Similarly, although to a lesser extent, a devout Hindu, Muslim, or Orthodox Jew may have more in common with a Mormon, due to their shared epistemological approach, than members of their own traditions whose beliefs have been largely secularized by the dominant progressive culture (Fenton, 1988; Smith, 1999; Wuthnow, 1999).

Consequently, an executive who holds an Evangelical spiritual orientation might switch denominations with each corporate move selecting a church with an orthodox understanding of truth. In situations where clients have repeatedly changed denominations, it may be appropriate to discard denominational affiliations entirely when color coding. In addition to depicting the major religious traditions, such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, secularism, etc., color coding might be used to portray the major epistemologically-based traditions within Christianity: Evangelicalism, liberal Protestantism, and conservative and liberal Roman Catholicism.

Similarly, when working with individuals from other major religious traditions, a similar epistemological demarcation often exists between orthodox believers on one hand, and progressive and secular/cultural adherents on the other. For instance, Fishbane (1999) notes that many individuals now consider the Jewish community to be two separate communities, with the rift so great that Orthodox Jews are unable to sanction their children marrying liberal Jews who may not be considered Jewish according to traditional rabbinic law.

Integration and Client Selection

It is not uncommon for both denominational and epistemological approaches discussed above to ring true in clients' experience. In such situations both methods may be incorporated into the genogram by dividing the symbols diagonally in two, with the left half designating the denomination and the right half the epistemological status. For example, while both parents may belong to the same Southern Baptist denomination as their daughter, the client may view her mother as a conservative and her father as a liberal. In this case, the right side of both symbols would be colored red, while the left side of the mother's circle might be colored yellow, to signify conservative beliefs, and the right side of the father's square is colored gray, to indicate liberal beliefs. Similarly, yellow and gray would be used with other individuals in the genogram to indicate orthodox and progressive spiritual orientations, with an additional color being used to depict other orientations if warranted in the client's perception (e.g., pink might be used on the left side of the symbol to portray a nominal, essentially secular Southern Baptist).

It is important to ensure that the religious preference and denominational affiliation accurately represents clients' phenomenological reality. As mentioned above, the essential point of color coding is to reflect the degree of spiritual and religious congruence and dissimilarity that exists throughout the family system. Accordingly, practitioners may wish to explain the basic concepts to clients and allow them to select the colors that most accurately reflect

their perceptions in a manner that serves as a good proxy for their spiritual orientation. While religious preference and denominational affiliation provide good starting points, particularly for grandparents, practitioners should seek to move beyond these initial markers to obtain a fuller understanding of how spirituality was expressed in the family system with clients making the final determinations.

Filling in the Picture

Significant spiritual events should also be recorded on the genogram. Baptisms (water and spirit), confirmations, church memberships, bar and bat mitzvahs, and other events that hold religious import can be delineated (Frame, 2000b). When possible, symbols drawn from clients' spiritual cosmology should be used to depict these events. For instance, charismatic or Pentecostal believers might use a dove to represent the filling of the Holy Spirit while Hindus might draw a relief of a temple to denote the significant effect the opening of a new temple had on their community. In addition to symbols, short summary statements can be delineated on the genogram to note significant events.

Depicting Notable Spiritual Relationships

In addition to depicting religious beliefs, it is also possible to include an affective component as well. Felt spiritual closeness between family members can be illustrated on spiritual genograms. Lines with double-headed arrows can be used to symbolize a relationship in which individuals experience a close reciprocal spiritual bond, with the thickness of the line indicating the intimacy or strength of the relationship (Hodge, 2000a). In situations in which the relationship was more hierarchical and less reciprocal, as might occur with a grandparent mentoring a grandchild, a single arrowhead can be used to depict the flow of spiritual resources. Finally, spiritual conflict can be portrayed with a jagged line, similar to a lightening bolt, drawn between the two individuals.

A Case Example

Within the constraints of the journal's black and white format, Figure 1 indicates what a relatively straightforward spiritual genogram might look like for a couple, Mark and Beth, who are experiencing martial problems. Various patterns (e.g., dots, diagonals, waves, etc.) are employed to depict differ-

ent denominations in place of the actual colors that would normally be used with a spiritual genogram.

As represented by the dotted "color" coding, Mark's family system is characterized by a single denominational affiliation, Southern Baptist, with the exception of his maternal grandmother, Stacy, who was a nominal Methodist. While the shared values have helped the family maintain a relatively close, loving bond, Mark has always felt especially attached to his maternal grandfather, crediting David for helping him to turn his life around in his teens when he was experimenting with illicit substances in defiance of his family's standards. David's mentoring relationship also played an instrumental role in his baptism at 19, which sparked a full return to active participation in his church fellowship. Also noted on Mark's spiritual genogram is that Kevin, Mark's father, had difficulty coming to terms with the death of his 82-year-old father until he received divine comfort in the form of a dream and that David has experienced some spiritual conflict with his wife Stacy over the years.

Beth's family system exhibits a greater degree of spiritual diversity. Her paternal grandmother, Carol, was raised Episcopalian. However, at age 17 she experienced an infilling of the Holy Spirit at an interdenominational Pentecostal youth rally. She subsequently left the Episcopal church, joining the Assemblies of God, where she met her husband, and raised her four children in that denomination. Although Reggie was only marginally involved in his faith community, his involvement with Carol led to a re-engagement with his fellowship. Hannah, the oldest daughter from Reggie and Carol's marriage, abandoned her faith for agnosticism during her college years, a decision that caused a degree of sorrow in the family.

Beth's parents are both particularly committed Christians, as signified by the open scriptures. Little is known about Beth's maternal grandmother, Jane, and nothing about her maternal grandfather. Beth's mother, Karen, experienced a particularly stormy upbringing that lasted into her mid-20s. A spiritual conversion at 28, and subsequent involvement in the Vineyard Christian Fellowship, led to a significantly sunnier period in Karen's life. As indicated by the heavy line, Carol has played an important role as a mentor in Karen's life after joining the family.

Beth's parents were heavily involved in church activities and have been accorded a number of hon-

ors for their contributions. During Beth's late teen years, an international mission trip to work with an oppressed desert dwelling population had a significant influence upon her life, sparking a lifelong sensitivity to social justice issues as she experienced God's heart for the poor and disenfranchised. While Beth has generally gotten along well with her parents, there have been frequent stormy periods, particularly with her mother. Ruth, her youth pastor, has been a significant spiritual influence in her life. Indeed, Ruth is widely respected in her parents' fellowship and has played a role as a role as a spiritual mentor with both of Beth's parents, although the relationship has been reciprocal.

Conducting an Assessment

Given the sacred nature of spirituality for many clients, it is important to obtain clients' consent before exploring the issue. For example, a practitioner might ask Mark and Beth if spirituality feels like an area they wish to explore. Similarly, the spiritual genogram should also be explained and permission secured before initiating construction. The exploration of clients' spiritual cosmologies should be conducted in a spirit of openness and respect which empowers clients to discover their own solutions (Rey, 1997). Clinicians should attempt to suspend their own values, to the extent possible and, with an attitude of curiosity and interest, seek to uncover and utilize resources from within clients' worldviews which they can use to solve the challenges they face (Dunn & Dawes, 1999). Similarly, rather than using terminology from their own spiritual cosmologies, practitioners should attempt to adopt the vocabulary of their clients.

Safeguarding Autonomy

When attempting to access the spiritual dimension, value conflicts stemming from differing epistemologies may place client autonomy at risk. Social workers disproportionately understand the world through a progressive/secular epistemological lens (Hunter, 1991). Conversely, many clients for whom spirituality is especially salient, particularly those who are disenfranchised, view reality through an orthodox lens (Davis & Robinson, 1996). Accordingly, workers may inadvertently privilege responses that concur with their values (Dor-Shav, Friedman & Tcherbonogura, 1978) especially since little has been

written about value conflicts from this perspective (Roberts, 1999b). When clients' cosmologies affirm, for example, complementary gender roles, sexual activity reserved for marriage, the sanctity of human life, including those with disabilities, and other values commonly associated with an orthodox framework, social workers must respect and affirm these values and refrain from implicitly imposing their own. The converse is equally true when orthodox practitioners work with progressive clients.

Practitioners can safeguard clients' autonomy by monitoring their own and clients' responses to sensitive, value-laden issues to ensure that clients are assenting to the movement of the clinical dialogue. Social workers should be aware that religious countertransference occurs commonly, particularly when addressing areas in which value systems conflict (Genia, 2000). For instance, feminist practitioners raised in a faith tradition which affirms complementary gender roles, such as Mark's Southern Baptist tradition, may find that clients who hold complementary views on gender relations evoke unresolved emotions that jeopardize the therapeutic relationship (Black, Jeffreys & Hartley, 1993).

Roberts (1999) also suggests that practitioners be sensitive to the biases of the dominant culture toward clients' spiritual belief systems. For instance, media outlets tend to frame people of faith negatively by, for example, neglecting to include context that might engender an empathetic understanding of believers' worldview or associating people of faith with negative characteristics or events (Skill & Robinson, 1994). Time magazine's decision not to mention (in their 20-page cover story) that the Columbine killers were motivated by anti-Christian hatred reflects the former bias while unfounded media accusations that Muslims were responsible for the Oklahoma City bombing reflects the latter (Rabey, 2000; Roberts, 1999). Clients may be more receptive toward sharing their personal spiritual narratives if workers demonstrate an empathetic awareness of the discrimination people of faith frequently encounter at the hands of the dominant culture.

Areas to Explore

While the construction of a spiritual genogram should be as client directed as possible, practitioners play an important role by helping clients explore their spiritual history. To assist in the exploration, social workers should be aware of a number of com-

mon patterns that may exist in clients' histories. While it is critical not to stereotype or generalize regarding spiritual beliefs (Griffith, 1999), it may also be helpful to be aware of some commonly occurring themes that may warrant exploration.

While most individuals are religiously active, over three-quarters become inactive during some point of their lives (O'Connor, et al., 1999). O'Conner and associates (1999) found that the average age at which inactivity began was 21, with the period of inactivity lasting approximately 7 years. Important life decisions that typically occur during the 20s can come back to haunt individuals when they re-engage their spiritual walk later in life. For example, courtship and marriage may occur when either one or both of the parties are inactive in their faith. Conflict may occur when individuals seek to re-connect with their spiritual roots.

Problems may also arise from differing levels of spiritual and religious involvement, even among denominations that hold generally similar theological views. Baptists, for example, may be much more likely to be spiritually and religiously engaged than Methodists or Catholics (O'Connor, et al., 1999). Accordingly, it is important to explore with the client denominational distinctives and how any differences in denomination or religious preference played themselves out in family life.

In aggregate, the salience of spirituality increases with age (Argue, Johnson & White, 1999). Consequently, grandparents may have an added desire to pass on their wisdom to their families, and close, cross-generational spiritual bonds may arise with spiritually receptive grandchildren. Further, in African American, as well as many other minority communities, the role of elders in the transmission of spiritual and religious values may take on a more prominent role (Dancy & Wynn-Dancy, 1994).

Wuthnow (1999) notes that growing up in a devout home places people in a distinct subculture. Much like individuals who fall under Hunter's (1991) ecumenism of orthodoxy, these people are often acutely aware that their values, morals, and perceptions differ from those of the dominant secular culture. As Talbot (2000) observes, in the midst of an ascendant secular culture, these individuals represent the new counterculture. Two prominent indicators that are associated with this discrete outlook are childhood environments in which one's parents read the Bible at home and regularly held family

devotions (Wuthnow, 1999).

Major life challenges frequently enhance the personal salience of spirituality (Pargament, 1997). Difficulties often serve to re-orient individuals toward an eternal perspective. While crisis can drive people away from God due to perceived lack of help in time of need, they more frequently have the reverse effect, as individuals seek refuge in the only Being that is able to transcend the current crisis (Ferraro & Kelley-Moore, 2000).

A new vision of the social work practitioner would include an openness that is not rooted in ego but which taps into the more creative, uncertain, and cosmic ways of knowing oneself and the world.

Encounters with angels, recently departed family members and other transpersonal beings occur relatively frequently (Gallup & Lindsay, 1999). For instance, approximately 50% of bereaved individuals experience the presence of the recently departed family member (Lindstrom, 1995). While these encounters are often life changing in nature, there may be a reluctance to share them, even with other family members, due to their perceived unusual nature (Fitchett, 1993; Morse & Perry, 1994). Such experiences may become cherished inspirational stories, treasured individually with a few trusted family members, or with the whole family depending upon the family's spiritual norms.

Table 1 provides practitioners with a list of possible questions that can be used in tandem with the above material to facilitate the exploration and construction of a spiritual genogram. The questions are grouped somewhat thematically, moving toward increasing degrees of personal disclosure. Given the highly personal nature of spirituality for many individuals, clients may find it easier answering questions about relatives' beliefs and practices than their own, at least until a degree of trust has been established. Concurrently, practitioners should not feel

locked into any specific order, nor should the exact wording necessarily be retained. Rather, much like the above material, they are offered as a resource to alert social workers to possible areas of inquiry that can be woven into the therapeutic dialogue to help clients access pertinent data.

Moving Toward Interventions

After the basic historical components of a spiritual genogram are set in place, it is appropriate to shift from the examination and depiction of past dynamics to highlighting present spiritual functioning. The focus shifts from other family members to the client. In this stage of the assessment, practitioners help clients explore how their past spiritual history has shaped their current spiritual functioning. It also sets the stage for shifting toward interventions.

Table 2 provides a list of sample questions that might be asked to foster reflection on how past history has influenced present functioning. Keeping in mind the same cautions as noted in regard to Table 1,

these questions generally move from personal exploration toward intervention. Consequently, in the context of the ensuing discussion, an attempt should be made to identify spiritual strengths that can be used to address presenting difficulties. Put differently, clients and practitioners should work together to ascertain spiritual resources and how these assets can be brought to bear on problems. As the case example illustrates, insights can be written on the spiritual genogram.

Interventions

While the interventions selected are dependent upon each client's unique life context, and the theoretical orientation of the clinician, there are a number of interventions that flow naturally from a spiritual genogram of which practitioners may wish to be aware. As Stanion, Papadopoulos and Bor (1997) record, constructing and exploring a genogram is a therapeutic intervention that often sparks significant changes. Fresh perspectives and assets that clients

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Table 1. *Possible Questions to Assist in Constructing a Spiritual Genogram*

■ What type of religious affiliation characterized each member of your family, going back to your grandparents? How meaningful was their relationship with their denomination/faith? Their church (house of worship)? To what extent were their personal beliefs and those of their church/denomination congruent? What was their level of participation? To what extent did they enjoy religious fellowship? Their spiritual lives?

■ How did they express their spiritual and religious beliefs? What were the particular rituals or sayings that were commonly evidenced? How were spirituality and religion assets in their lives? How did their spirituality intersect with the difficulties they encountered in life? How did their faith help them cope with trials?

■ What spiritually significant events (transitions/conversions/changes in affiliations/encounters with transpersonal beings) have occurred in the family? How did these events affect the individuals involved? How did other members react to these changes?

■ What are the differences (and similarities) among various family members in their beliefs (practices)? How were differences and conflicts managed? Who was the spiritual leader in your family? What role did your grandparents play in your spiritual walk?

■ What spiritual relationships stand out to you in your childhood years? What are your earliest religious memories? Did your family hold regular devotional times? What types of spiritually-based practices occurred at home? Which members of your family have had most influence on your spiritual walk? Who do you feel closest to in a spiritual sense?

had previously been conscious of in only a peripheral sense, are brought into concrete relief by their physical depiction. In turn, social workers can build on these developments to solidify change.

New narratives can often be fostered as clients see themselves as actors in empowering stories. For example, clients may be able to discern God's hand in certain circumstances over the course of time. A pattern of God's personal intervention, previously undiscerned, may be apparent in the genogram. For example, Mark and Beth's spiritual genogram clearly depicts God's intervention in Kevin's life as well as Carol's and Karen's with significant positive ramifications echoing down through the family systems. Instead of seeing themselves as isolated individuals, overwhelmed by life's circumstances, clients see themselves as under the providential care of God. Disempowering discourses can be altered by such insights, opening up new possibilities to address problems (Richert, 1999).

Working with a Christian sample, Pargament and Brant (1998, p. 122) have identified a number of positive attributions that may help individuals cope

with crisis. Table 3 provides a redacted list of these attributions. Practitioners may be able to foster the adoption of positive narratives by highlighting these attributions when they appear in clients' family histories. Similarly, workers may want to explore to what extent these attitudes exist during the construction of spiritual genograms when working with Christian clients.

Cognitive approaches using spiritual content have been demonstrated to be effective with both Muslims (Azhar, Varma & Dharap, 1994; Azhar & Varma, 1995a; Azhar & Varma, 1995b) and Christians (Hawkins, Tan & Turk, 1999; Propst, 1996). Spiritual genograms can be used to detect healthy beliefs that are spiritually based and substitute them for unproductive beliefs in accordance with the standard tenets of cognitive therapy.

Spiritual genograms also afford the opportunity to reconnect with both the spiritual roots and strengths of family members. As Walsh (1999a, p. 43) noted, "restoring vital bonds with a family's religious heritage is healing and empowering." For instance, a young African American struggling

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Table 2. *Questions That Might be Used for Transitioning to Interventions*

■ In relationship to your family, what are your current religious and spiritual beliefs? How have your beliefs (practices/feelings) changed since childhood (adolescence)? How has your family's beliefs and practices affected your present expression of spirituality?

■ To what extent do you experience conflict (fellowship/harmony) with other family members over your spiritual beliefs? What have you accepted and rejected from your family's spiritual history? What prompted these decisions?

■ What sort of patterns do you see emerging over time? How does your present spirituality intersect with these patterns? How has God worked through your family? How has God worked through your family to touch you?

■ How does your spirituality assist you in dealing with difficulties? Are there religious practices that help you cope with trials? Does the severity of your problem(s) dissipate or disappear when you engage in certain spiritual practices? What does your faith teach about forgiveness? How have you been able to apply this teaching in your own life?

■ Are there spiritual strengths in your family's history that you could draw upon to help you deal with problems? Are methods of dealing with problems that you might be able to adapt from others? What sort of insights could you draw from your spiritual genogram that might help you to address your current difficulties?

with racism might benefit from learning how the Christian beliefs of elderly grandparents enabled them to overcome similar problems (Johnson, 1995). Not only is the relational connection empowering, but practical strategies can be gleaned to tackle extant problems. Or to use the case study as an example, Mark may benefit from exploring with his maternal grandfather, David, how to overcome his marital conflicts in light of David's own struggles with his wife.

Spiritual genograms may also suggest opportunities to become engaged in local fellowships, church bodies, small groups, and other faith-based communities. Social support can be a key factor in overcoming problems. For example, Maton and Salem's (1995) longitudinal examination of an Evangelical congregation revealed an empowering, supportive, strengths-based atmosphere that engendered an increased sense of self-worth, connectedness, and optimism regarding the future. Additionally, religiously based social support may be qualitatively and quantitatively superior to social support obtained in other forums (Ellison & George, 1994). In the case of individuals who are not currently involved in a faith-based group, spiritual genograms may reveal such strengths, perhaps in the lives of other family members, and encourage personal re-engagement with one's own tradition. Alternatively, sporadic attendees may decide to increase their level of interaction. In the case of regular attenders, such as Mark and Beth, the possibility of untapped resources that might be used to address problem areas can be explored.

Rituals can often be used to address problems. The intensity of problems may be attenuated when clients engage in certain rituals, such as prayer, worship,

family devotions, scripture reading, music, participation in faith-based activities such as Promise Keepers, youth mentoring programs, etc. In solution-based terminology, they often represent a time when "exceptions" from present difficulties are experienced. By building on what works in clients' lives, problems can be overcome in other areas (Kuehl, 1996; Kuehl, 1995). Spiritual genograms can be used to identify current rituals, or those of other family members who have encountered similar problems.

For example, a spiritual genogram may reveal a family ritual that fell into disuse after a particular person's death that could be accessed to address a current problem (Roberts, 1999a). Finally, there is a growing empirical body of work on the efficacy of forgiveness interventions (McCullough, Paragament & Thoresen, 2000). Essentially all major world religions endorse forgiveness as an expression of orthodox faith (Rye, et al., 2000). Spiritual genograms are perhaps the ideal tool to identify conflicted family relationships and tap into the necessary spiritual resources to foster healing. DiBlasio's (1998) article provides a good overview of the use of decision-based forgiveness interventions within the context of intergenerational therapy. It should also be mentioned that many of the practical suggestions DiBlasio lists can be transferred to forgiveness interventions directed toward individuals outside the family unit.

Table 3.
Positive Cognitive Attributions During a Crisis

Thought about how my life is part of a larger physical force

Worked together with God as partners to get through this hard time

Looked to God for strength, support, and guidance in this crisis

Thought about sacrificing my own well-being and living only for God

Tried to find the lessons from God in the crisis

Looked for spiritual support from my church in this crisis

Tried to give spiritual support to others

Confessed my sins and asked for God's forgiveness

Asked God to help me find a new purpose in living

Note: Redacted from Pargament and Brant (1998)

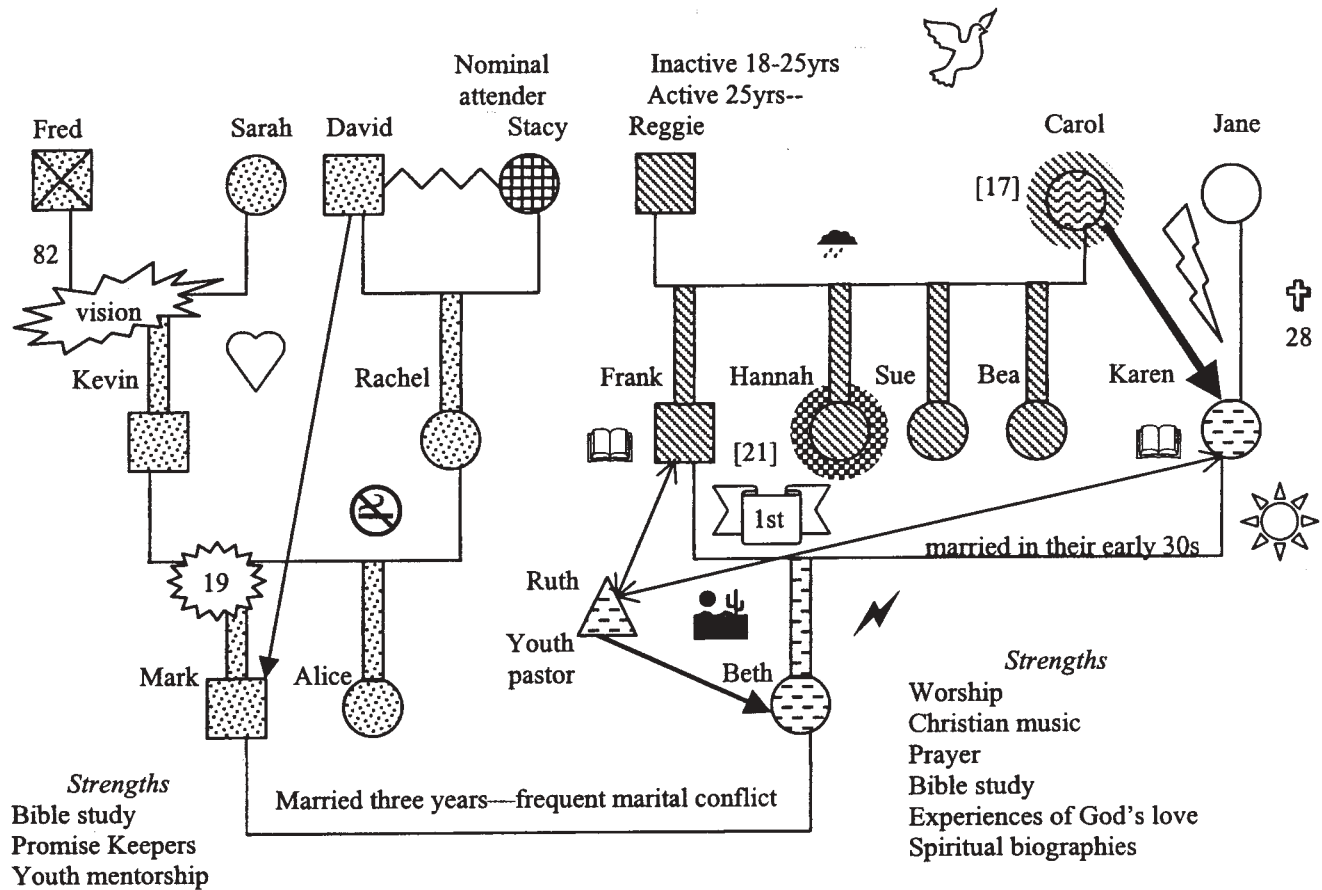## Uses of Spiritual Genograms

Although spiritual genograms can be effective instruments in a number of situations, social workers may find them to be particularly useful when clients present with problems involving family members or

Figure 1. *Example of a Spiritual Genogram*

family of origin issues. For example, Heller and Wood's (2000) examination of couples that married individuals from other faiths found that they experienced unique barriers to intimacy that were spiritually based. For these intermarried couples to achieve intimacy levels comparable to those who married within their tradition, the couples had to work through these differences. As the case example illustrates, spiritual genograms serve as an effective tool to expose areas of difference and potential conflict as well as highlighting the respective spiritual strengths each person brings to the relationship.

Conversely, spiritual genograms could also be used with couples from similar backgrounds to increase their level of intimacy. Heller and Wood (2000) found that couples who affirmed the same tradition achieved high intimacy levels based upon their shared understanding. Thus, practitioners may find spiritual genograms to be a useful tool for in-

creasing intimacy by further drawing out similarities and then building upon the couple's commonalties.

Spiritual genograms can also be useful in dealing with recent immigrants from various faith traditions. For instance, Daneshpour (1998) noted that genograms were crucial when working with Muslims due to the sense of cohesion and interdependency among family members. In such cases spiritual genograms can highlight spiritual resources, important relationships and other spiritually-based information that is significant for understanding clients and ameliorating their problems.

Poole (1998) noted that genograms may be helpful with Hispanics as they show respect for tradition and help connect spiritual and religious dimensions to treatment plans. Similarly, they may also be particularly useful with other populations that have a prominent sense of extended family and/or where spirituality is an important facet

of existence, such as African Americans (Frame & Williams, 1996).

Conversely, spiritual genograms may be an inappropriate assessment instrument in some situations. For instance, certain clients may not connect past functioning with present conditions and, consequently, may believe that genogram construction constitutes a misuse of therapeutic time (Kuehl, 1995).

In such situations, more present-focused assessment approaches, such as spiritual eco-maps (Hodge, 2000a) may better suit clients' desires due to their "here and now" orientation and their relatively rapid construction. However, the time involved in constructing a spiritual genogram can be substantially reduced by orienting clients to the concepts involved, perhaps supplemented by having them read this article, and assigning the construction of the instrument as a homework assignment.

Finally, in light of time limitations, many social workers are adopting techniques drawn from brief modalities. While a number of interventions profiled in this paper are either drawn from, or are congruent with, brief approaches, readers interested in further information may wish to consult two articles written by Kuehl (1996; 1995). Kuehl provides an extended discussion on the integration of solution-oriented approaches and genograms that can be used to supplement the material presented in this article.

Conclusion

Spirituality often plays a critical role in family systems (Wuthnow, 1999). Further, many clients wish to incorporate their spiritual and religious values into the therapeutic dialogue (Bart, 1998; Privette, Quackenbos & Bundrick, 1994). The strength of spiritual genograms is their ability to reveal generationally informed spiritual conflicts and resources and connect clients with those resources to solve problems. For families and individuals who desire to understand how their religious heritage intersects with present functioning, and draw upon that heritage to address current challenges, this approach may represent the ideal assessment method.

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