

Spirituality Genograms

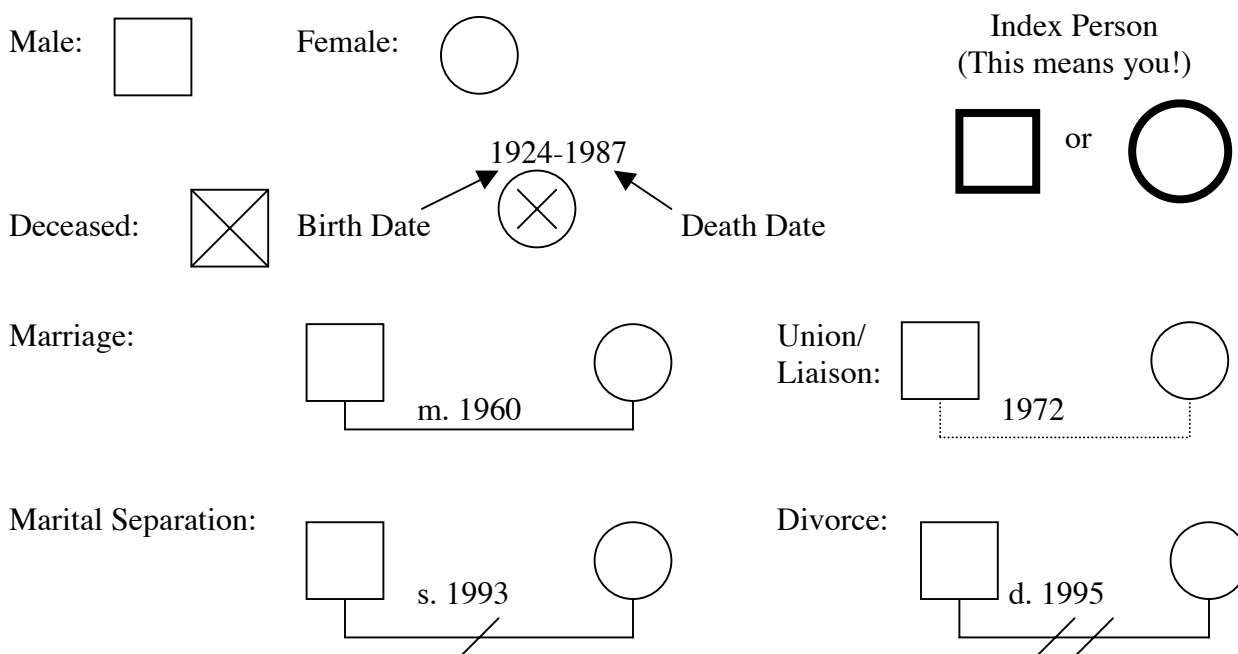
Introduction

Counselors, teachers and supervisors need to be comfortable with religious and spiritual matters and gain clarity about their personal spiritual beliefs to effectively include a spiritual focus in their work (Haug, 1998). The purpose of constructing a personal spiritual genogram is threefold: (1) to provide a structure to explore one's personal history of spirituality and religiosity, (2) to explore one's current understanding of spirituality and religiosity, and (3) to explore the interaction between one's personal spirituality/religiosity and professional functioning.

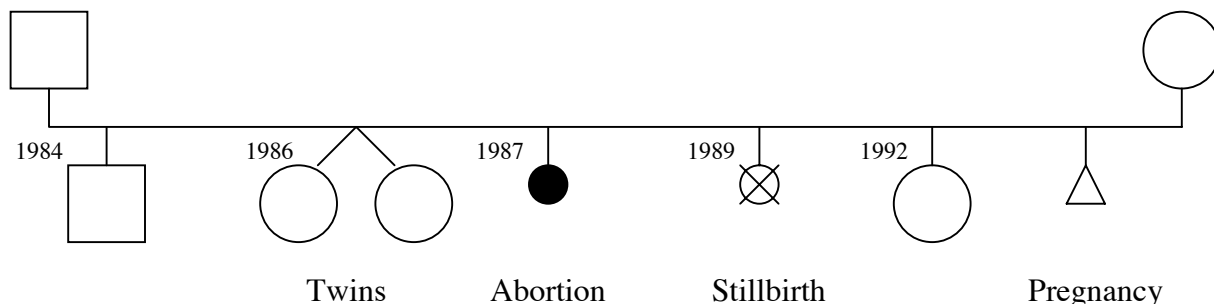
Step 1: Constructing a Basic Genogram

A genogram provides a structure for collecting and "storing" family information. It is similar to a family tree. The first step in this project is to design your family genogram. If this is a new process to you, utilize the following guidelines and example. There is no "right" way to construct a genogram. Therefore, each person's genogram will be unique.

Basic Genogram Symbols



Children - list in birth order, beginning with oldest on left:



Step 2: Exploring and Collecting Historical Information

Step 2 entails gathering family information and “filling in” your genogram. Utilize the following questions as a guide to enhance historical knowledge concerning religion and spirituality within your multigenerational system. Remember – you are looking for facts and patterns related to spirituality and religiosity. You are a detective. Have fun!

1. How important was religious practice or affiliation? What religious affiliations exist within your family?
2. What was the importance of religion in the extended family? How did it influence family members’ beliefs (about human nature, life’s meanings, etc), feelings (such as hopelessness, caring, fear, guilt, etc), their behaviors (in relationships inside or outside the family, religious practices, etc)?
3. How have religious/spiritual beliefs influenced self-esteem, marriage, parenting, sexuality, and familial responsibilities and loyalties?
4. How has/does your family system celebrate rituals of connection: family meals, rising and retiring, coming and going, going out and going away, couple rituals, etc?
5. How has/does the family system observe rituals of celebration and community: special-person rituals (birthdays, Mother’s Day, Father’s Day), Thanksgiving, Christmas, community and religious rituals, rituals of passage (weddings and funerals), etc?
6. What do you see as the core spiritual, empowering messages embedded in your family’s religious beliefs and practices?
7. Who in your extended family was particularly spiritual and how did it show in their way of life (cognitively, affectively, behaviorally), and through the life cycle?
8. In what ways was spirituality or religion ever a source of strength and/or a cause of conflict in the family? Explain.
9. What about the family’s or specific family members’ spirituality or religion did you personally experience as empowering or constraining?
10. What positive or negative messages did you get publicly or implicitly about other spiritual or religious beliefs and practices?
11. What are the unique features of the religious/spiritual orientation of your family?

Step 3: Clarifying your personal spirituality or religiosity

While Step 2 focused more on the past, Step 3 focuses on the present. Now is the time to ask yourself a series of questions about your own spirituality/religiosity. Remember to make abbreviated notes on your genogram. Your genogram is probably getting busy now – so use your discretion on what you add. Here are a few guiding questions.

1. Do you maintain a particular religious affiliation – if yes, how actively involved are you and how does this translate into daily practice and life style choices?
2. What does spirituality mean to you? Put a few key words next to your name on your genogram.
3. How has your family’s spiritual or religious heritage influenced your personal philosophy (about human nature, right action, wrong doing and forgiveness, life’s meaning, etc), your feeling (hopelessness, guilt, confidence, etc.) your behavior?
4. How and through what experiences have these understandings changed through the years, particularly: how have they changed as a result of professional training?

5. Have you seriously considered alternative beliefs and their consequences for your life. Explain.
6. What if anything about your spirituality or religion do you experience as confining or tyrannical, what do you experience as life enhancing or liberating?
7. How free are you to challenge unhelpful beliefs and choose more empowering alternatives? Explain.
8. How willing are you to act on your beliefs? Give examples.
9. What language (terms) are you comfortable using to convey spiritual beliefs?
10. How willing and comfortable are you in sharing your spiritual beliefs and when do you think this might be appropriate?

Step 4: Linking your personal spirituality with professional functioning

Step 4 entails reflecting upon your family history (Steps 1 & 2) and your personal understandings (Step 3) and exploring their influence/impact on your professional functioning. The following questions should get you started.

1. How, specifically, do your spiritual beliefs inform your conceptualizations, attitudes and behaviors within the counseling context – the way you constitute yourself in relation to clients, your view of human nature, relationships, and change, etc?
2. How might your spirituality or religion, including the language you convey them, help of hinder your effectiveness as a therapist or make it difficult for you to work with particular clients?
3. How comfortable are you with other forms of spirituality or religion, including their language, rituals, and metaphors?
4. What, if any, religious/spiritual issues might clients raise that might make you uncomfortable?
5. How will you respond to clients whose beliefs or behaviors violate your personal spiritual beliefs?
6. Given your spiritual beliefs, what is your preferred model of counseling?

Follow-up Discussion: All participants are encouraged to participate in a group discussion, which will focus on your reactions and learnings. Please refer to your schedule for the specific date and time. You are encouraged to bring your genogram with you. At this time participants will complete a brief post-test.

References: The following sources were used in the development of this project.

- DeMaria, R., Weeks, G. & Hof, L. (1999). Intergenerational assessment of individuals, couples, and families: Focused genograms. Philadelphia: Brunner/Mazel.
- Haug, I. E. (1998). Spirituality as a dimension of family therapists' clinical training. Contemporary Family Therapy, 20, 4.
- Miller, G. (1999). The development of the spiritual focus in counseling and counselor education. Journal of Counseling & Development, 77, Fall 1999.