

## THE CULTURAL GENOGRAM: KEY TO TRAINING CULTURALLY COMPETENT FAMILY THERAPISTS

Kenneth V. Hardy Tracey A. Laszloffy  
Syracuse University

*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

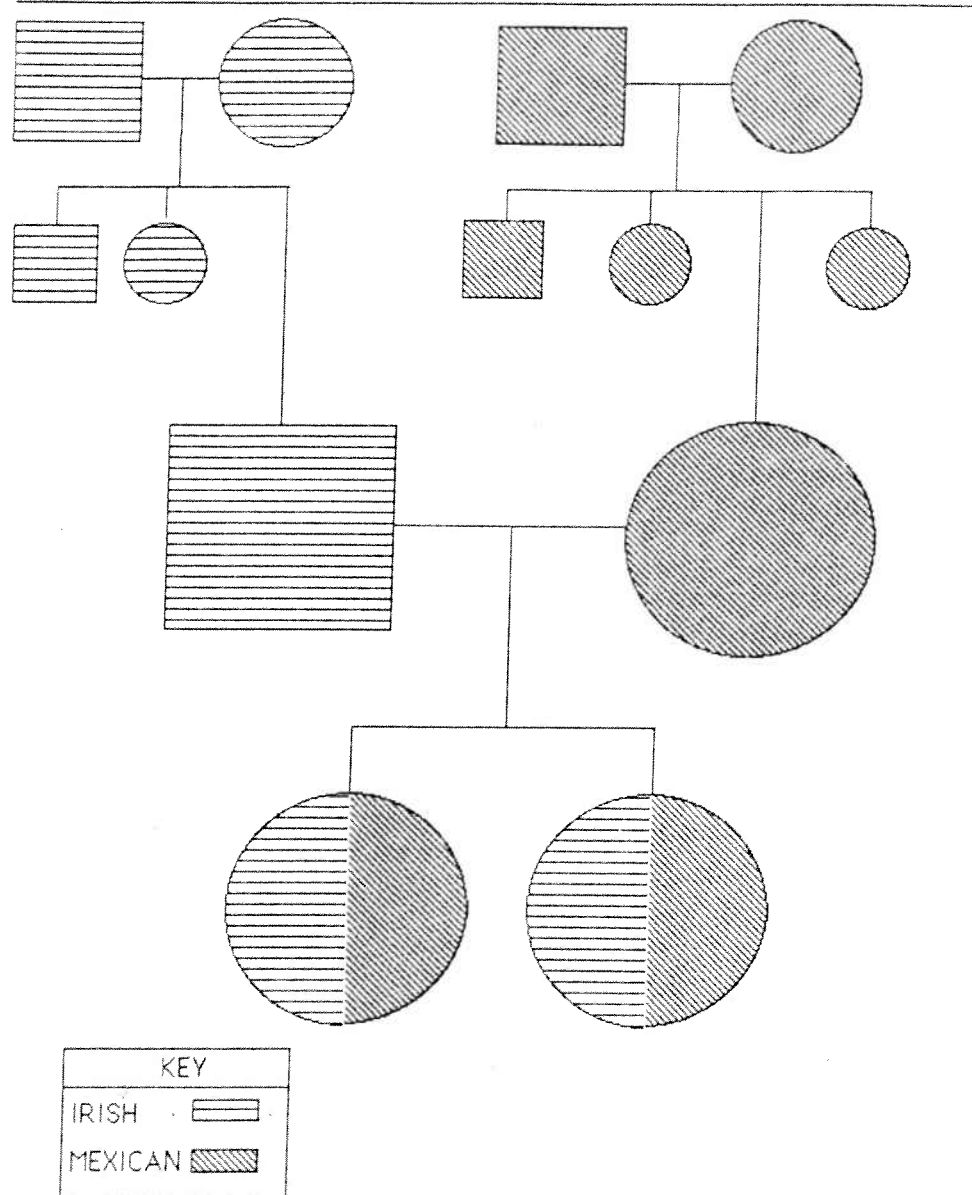
Training programs devoted to preparing culturally competent therapists must recognize and attend to the distinction between awareness and sensitivity. Awareness is primarily a cognitive function; an individual becomes conscious of a thought or action and processes it intellectually. Sensitivity, on the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

---

Kenneth V. Hardy, PhD, is Director of Clinical Training and Research of the Marriage and Family Therapy Program, Syracuse University, 008 Slocum Hall, Syracuse, NY 13244.

Tracey A. Laszloffy, MA, is a Doctoral Student in the Marriage and Family Therapy Program, Syracuse University, 008 Slocum Hall, Syracuse, NY 13244.

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

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?
-