

Self-Awareness and Counselor Identity Development

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The creation of the Genogram was a complex and enlightening process. I carefully added family members spanning three generations, with whom I had significant contact since childhood. However, I cannot recall any vivid memories of their feelings or specific experiences during memories and events where race, gender, class, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, ability, appearance, and age were the focus. My family has always been sensitive to race, ethnicity, religion, spiritual heritage, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, socioeconomic status, traditions, and family heritage. My family, on both my father's and mother's sides, was not religious, but they were surrounded by friends who were nonjudgmental about any differences. They had friends from all different backgrounds and orientations.

I am aware of the differences in cultures, but those differences were just differences to me. My family never focused on people's differences; they never saw colors in black and white, and even though religion was not a focus in my family's lives, we were surrounded by those who were. Because my genogram represents a bland view of cultural prejudice and oppression, symbolized by the black triangle, I used other genogram symbols to describe other familial dysfunctions. My maternal grandmother had some mental health concerns that I believe my mother's brother and sister now have. My maternal grandfather committed suicide when I was in college, which likely accelerated any genetic predispositions my aunt or uncle had because the trauma was a bit unbearable. My family, although lacking prejudicial or oppressive concerns, had distant or broken relationships. If and when suffering occurred, it was done quietly. If prejudices existed, I did not know or was shielded from it. From this analysis, I have concluded the disability of mental illness, which runs in my family, speaking about the effects, and getting the proper help when needed has been oppressed for three generations. That ends with me.

This assignment has reinforced my understanding of my family's history concerning mental illness and how it should be addressed and discussed. I was previously married before my current husband and my ex-husband was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. My lack of knowledge about mental illness and the stigma attached to it made it difficult for me to handle that relationship. This family history of mental illness is what inspired me to become a counselor. Mental illness can range from mild to severe, and there needs to be more awareness in our society.