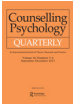


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## The transgenerational trauma and resilience genogram

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The understanding of trauma within counseling has expanded to include the salience of ecosystemic factors and to acknowledge the importance of multi-cultural and social justice considerations. Transgenerational trauma and resilience offers a framework that examines trauma across generations, attends to ecosystemic concerns, and adheres to a strengths-based perspective. However, given the complexity of trauma counseling and attending to the multitude of ecosystemic factors, counselors and psychologists may struggle to conduct comprehensive assessments and interventions with their clients. Genograms have long been used to clarify complex family and psychological patterns through visual representations, and are, therefore, a promising tool to meet this need. The Transgenerational Trauma and Resilience Genogram (TTRG) was created as a dynamic tool that can assist practitioners in conducting compressive trauma assessment and intervention from a transgenerational trauma and resilience framework. The TTRG emphasizes an ecosystemic view of trauma, culturally relevant and strength-based interventions, and attention to sociopolitical concerns that may impact trauma and recovery. The author explicates the use of the TTRG in trauma counseling, including the theoretical foundations and implications for trauma and recovery. A case example of the use of the TTRG and implications for counseling practice using the TTRG and its guiding principles are provided.

**Keywords:** trauma counseling; resilience; transgenerational trauma; genogram; ecosystemic

The understanding of trauma and trauma counseling has increased rapidly over the past several decades. Today, counselors and psychologists working with individuals, families, and communities that have experienced trauma are equipped with an understanding of trauma symptoms and assessments, as well as the complex issues, such as cultural and sociopolitical factors, that influence the experience of and recovery from trauma (e.g. Collins & Collins, 2005; Dass-Brailsford, 2007; Hoffman & Kruczek, 2011). In particular, scholarship on transgenerational trauma, or the transmission of trauma within families and communities across generations, indicates the need for practitioners to examine and address both historical and current trauma with their clients (Danieli, 1998, 2007). Despite the negative psychological effects of trauma, counseling scholars have emphasized that trauma can also lead to the formation of new strengths and positive ways of coping and making meaning (Goodman & West-Olatunji, 2008; Harvey, 2007).

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Resilience refers to the “ability to withstand and rebound from disruptive life challenges” by using strengths, resources, and positive adaptations (Walsh, 2003, p. 1). Counselors and psychologists can use the lens of resilience within an ecosystemic framework to promote the inherent strengths and systemic supports of their clients who have experienced trauma.

Concept maps, genograms, and other visual webbing tools have been used within counseling and related fields for many decades to explicitly include a systemic perspective of families and individuals within families (Chrzastowski, 2011; McGoldrick & Gerson, 1985; McGoldrick, Gerson, & Petry, 2008; Papadopoulos & Bor, 1997). In particular, the genogram has been used to highlight patterns of family functioning, such as enmeshment between family members or substance abuse. The genogram has been adapted for use in a number of contexts, including trauma patterns within families (Jordan, 2004). As the use of genograms has expanded, scholars have addressed the limitations of traditionally constructed genograms, such as the focus on the nuclear family that may not include larger communities or extended family or supports (McGoldrick et al., 2008). Greater emphasis has also been placed on ensuring that genograms include sources of family strengths and resilience, instead of focusing only on maladaptive family patterns – an aspect that is particularly critical when engaging in trauma counseling (Walsh, 2006). With this in mind, the author presents the Transgenerational Trauma and Resilience Genogram (TTRG) as a dynamic tool for compressive trauma assessment and intervention. The TTRG can facilitate comprehensive and culturally relevant assessment, promote intergenerational strengths, and attend to sociopolitical and ecosystemic concerns that may impact trauma and recovery. The purpose of this paper is to explicate the use of the TTRG in trauma counseling, including the theoretical foundations and implications for trauma and recovery. The author provides a case example of the use of the TTRG and implications for counseling practice using the TTRG and its guiding principles.

## Review of the literature

### *Foundations of trauma*

The understanding of trauma has increased significantly, particularly since post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was added to the third edition of the American Psychiatric Association’s (APA) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM)* in 1980. Symptoms of trauma include: (a) intrusive recollection (reexperiencing the traumatic event, flashbacks, dreams); (b) hyper-arousal (difficulty concentrating or sleeping, increased startle response); and (c) avoidance (detachment, lack of interest, inability to recall trauma, dissociation) (APA, 2000). Research exploring the neuropsychological effects of trauma also provides important information for the practice of trauma counseling. Memory formation may be disrupted during the traumatic event, creating traumatic memories that include emotional and sensory information about the event, but lack cognitive information that allows the individual to create a narrative memory (Rothschild, 2000; Scaer, 2007). The integration of traumatic memory is, therefore, a significant part of trauma recovery and resilience so that clients can develop a more complete narrative memory about the event (Harvey et al., 2003; Rothschild, 2000).

An ecological perspective, first proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1977), has been suggested as an effective framework for trauma counseling (e.g. Hoffman & Kruczek,

2011; Stanciu & Rogers, 2011). An ecological framework provides an understanding of human development that includes contextual factors and the interactions between the systems in which individuals exist (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). In particular, the ecological framework may help to promote resilience following trauma (Harvey, 2007). This approach incorporates the multiple aspects that influence the trauma and recovery experience, including culture and sociopolitical factors that have been excluded from more limited perspectives on trauma and recovery and may buffer or exacerbate the traumatic experience (Goodman & West-Olatunji, 2008; Harvey et al., 2003). Further, an ecological perspective allows resilience to be understood as multidimensional (Harvey, 2007): counselors and psychologists can assist survivors in developing the strengths and coping that they are exhibiting, while also attending to other areas where they are experiencing difficulties coping.

For instance, Falicov (2007) noted ecological factors that either promote or inhibit the well-being of immigrants who have experienced stress or trauma, such as environments that honor cultural differences and provide support services through community organizations (e.g. language training, empowerment groups) vs. those that are discriminatory and provide differential resources to immigrants as compared to citizens (e.g. services only in English, restricted government benefits). Accessing or developing support from families and communities is a frequently noted recommendation for trauma recovery (Goodman & West-Olatunji, 2008; Herman, 1997), which may be impacted by the accessibility of family support services and social services in the environment. In other words, ecological factors influence whether an individual can access support from families and communities. Accessing these supports is critical for the development of resilience, since both can help the client to make meaning from the experience and to utilize existing intrapersonal and interpersonal strengths.

### ***Transgenerational trauma and resilience***

Within the field of trauma, transgenerational trauma has emerged as a framework for understanding trauma across generations. Although expressed in oral and written histories across cultures for many generations, the study within the field of counseling and psychology is still nascent (Danieli, 2007). Transgenerational (also called intergenerational or multigenerational) trauma refers to the transmission of trauma from one generation to the next (Dass-Brailsford, 2007). Much of the study of transgenerational trauma grew out of the work with the children of Holocaust survivors in the 1960s (Danieli, 1998; Dass-Brailsford, 2007). Since then, the framework has been applied to understanding the cycle of domestic violence within families and child abuse (Frazier, West-Olatunji, St Juste, & Goodman, 2009; Simons & Johnson, 1998), the trauma experienced by families of soldiers (Rosenheck & Fontana, 1998), and trauma passed down to families who lived within repressive regimes (Baker & Gippenreiter, 1998). Transgenerational trauma can have impacts at the individual, family, and community level, meaning that symptoms of trauma can manifest and cause distress or dysfunction at any of these levels (Evans-Campbell, 2008). While focusing on the current impact of historical trauma, transgenerational trauma scholars have also examined how current and historical traumas intersect, particularly for marginalized populations. One example is the transgenerational trauma for African-American descendants of slaves, which intersects with present-day racism (Cross, 1998; Leary, 2005).

Indeed, research on the impact of systemic oppression indicates that discrimination and racism may be sources of traumatic stress for individuals and communities (Carter, 2007; Paradies, 2006). However, the *DSM-IV-TR* definition of trauma, which has guided much study and treatment of trauma, remains limited in that it fails to incorporate trans-generational and ecosystemic trauma because it defines trauma as an event in which, "The person experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others" (APA, 2000, p. 467). As such, scholars have called for an expanding understanding of trauma that includes individual perception of trauma and incorporates intergenerational and ecosystemic causes of traumatic stress (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005; Goodman & West-Olatunji, 2008; Rothschild, 2000).

The transgenerational framework also includes the transmission of resilience across generations. While trauma might be conveyed from parent to child, coping strategies, ways of overcoming traumatic stress, and ways of sustaining one's culture despite oppression may also be passed down (Duran, Firehammer, & Gonzalez, 2008). For example, individuals who saw their parents overcome a natural disaster might be able to recall the strength and sense of perseverance that their parents possessed, and use this as a guide for overcoming the present-day disaster (Goodman & West-Olatunji, 2008). For families with a long history of trauma, persecution, or discrimination, resilience factors might include protective mechanisms such as becoming a cohesive and somewhat closed family system. Resilience also includes the flexibility to adapt these protective mechanisms to the current context, such as increasing protection when threatened or relaxing in times of safety (Danieli, 2007).

### *The use of genograms in counseling*

Genograms, which originated from the field of family systems counseling, have been used as a way to understand and assess complex family patterns through visual mapping (Chrzastowski, 2011; McGoldrick et al., 2008; Papadopoulos & Bor, 1997). Genograms have focused on intergenerational patterns, such as enmeshment between family members, substance abuse patterns, and marriages or divorces (McGoldrick et al., 2008). Practitioners and scholars have extended the use of the genogram in a number of ways. Solution-focused approaches with the genogram have been suggested to include a more strength-focused perspective, reducing the emphasis on dysfunction and emphasizing instead possibilities for solutions (Kuehl, 1995). Including sources of strength within the genogram enables the counselor and client to move beyond a deficit focus to one that promotes resilience (Walsh, 2006).

Additional revisions to the traditional genogram structure can serve to be more inclusive of diverse individuals and families. For example, a multicultural genogram incorporates cultural dimensions, including immigration/acclulturation factors, ethnic and racial identities, social class, gender, and spiritual/religious identities (Thomas, 1998). This genogram can elicit an understanding of the intersection of multiple dimensions of identity, which may be missing from a traditional genogram. The gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender (GLBT) genogram (Chen-Hayes, 2003) has been recommended for GLBT clients to explore both family of origin patterns as well as family of choice patterns, which may be significant for GLBT clients, particularly when there is strain in family of origin relationships (Oswald, 2002). Clients can also create their own symbols for

the genogram to represent and affirm aspects of their GLBT identity that might not be included in the traditional genogram (Chen-Hayes, 2003).

The genogram concept has been extended to include an ecosystemic perspective beyond the nuclear family. The community genogram has been recommended to incorporate cultural and contextual factors that impact an individual, and to focus on strengths and resources within a person's social systems (Ivey & Ivey, 1999). The critical genogram also examines the ecosystems in which a person exists, paying particular attention to social, political, and economic systems (Kosutic et al., 2009). This genogram emphasizes deconstructing forms of oppression and identifying ways in which an individual can increase her or his consciousness and take action to transform oppressive systems. Use of a critical or liberatory perspective is particularly important in trauma counseling so as to deconstruct the experiences of oppression that may intersect with trauma (Martín-Baró, 1994). For instance, traumatic events are often the product of social injustice (e.g. religious persecution) or are excused or ignored because of discrimination (e.g. violence against women). As such, individuals experiencing traumatic events are likely to have their lived experiences marginalized or invalidated, possibly engendering self-blame, internalized oppression, and difficulty in healing and developing resilience (Herman, 1997). The deconstruction of oppression promotes trauma healing by helping trauma survivors identify the external and unjust causes instead of internalizing trauma symptoms as intrapsychic or collective weaknesses (Martín-Baró, 1994).

Finally, genograms have been applied within trauma counseling. Jordan (2004) recommended the color-coded timeline trauma genogram (CCTTG) for use with individuals and families who have experienced trauma. In the CCTTG, traumatic events within the family (e.g. mother's attempted suicide, sister's car accident) are organized chronologically within the client's lifespan. In addition, Ivey and Ivey (1999) recommended including a discussion of sensorimotor narratives (e.g. feeling, hearing) in their community genogram. This can be particularly relevant for trauma counseling given the symptoms noted above that often accompany the post-trauma experience (Rothschild, 2000).

Advances in the understanding of trauma coupled with the realization that counselors and psychologists must address ecosystemic factors beyond intrapsychic concerns engender a need for counseling techniques that can integrate this knowledge. There is great potential to expand the use of genograms in trauma counseling using a perspective that integrates transgenerational trauma and resilience with cultural and contextual factors in trauma and recovery. Genograms have potential not only as assessment tools, but also as therapeutic interventions themselves (Papadopoulos & Bor, 1997). Presented is a description of the TTRG and its use in trauma counseling assessment and intervention. The integration of the multifaceted understanding of trauma with the genogram offers a tool for counselors and psychologists that is strength-focused, culturally responsive, and addresses historical and sociopolitical factors. The TTRG can be used with individuals, families, and communities that have been impacted by trauma.

### **Transgenerational trauma and resilience genogram**

The TTRG is a tool that is grounded in the trauma and recovery literature, an ecosystemic framework, and a sociopolitical and culturally relevant perspective. The purpose of the TTRG is to integrate critical frameworks for understanding and addressing

trauma in counseling through a visual tool that can help elucidate complex and multi-faceted aspects of trauma. There are several principles that guide the use of the TTRG. These guiding principles are that the TTRG (a) includes a comprehensive or ecosystemic understanding of trauma, (b) focuses on strengths, (c) is culturally responsive, and (d) attends to social justice considerations through a critical or liberatory perspective. Generally, these principles guide a counselor’s work from an ecosystemic, social justice-oriented perspective; the TTRG enables the counselor to work collaboratively with a client to integrate this perspective in counseling. The following section is a discussion of the TTRG theory and content, which is followed by a case example that illustrates the use of the TTRG with a client.

**Ecosystemic understanding of trauma**

In using the TTRG, counselors and psychologists should incorporate a comprehensive, ecosystemic understanding of trauma. As depicted in Table 1, this view of trauma incorporates direct and indirect sources of trauma, meaning that in addition to identifying

Table 1. Ecosystemic view of trauma and resilience.

	Direct trauma	Indirect trauma
Traditional	<p>Individual directly experiences trauma as traditionally (<i>DSM-IV-TR</i>) defined</p> <p>Examples: Car accident, abuse, death of loved one</p> <p>Possible trauma for Karen: Tornado, terminal illness of mother, conflict and divorce of parents</p> <p>Possible resilience for Karen: Ways in which Karen did or could access support or make meaning during or following traumatic or stressful events</p>	<p>Individual indirectly experiences trauma from traditionally (<i>DSM-IV-TR</i>) defined sources (transgenerational trauma)</p> <p>Examples: Children of Holocaust survivors, Vietnam veterans, or hurricane survivors</p> <p>Possible trauma for Karen: Mother’s family exposure to boarding schools, governmental oppression</p> <p>Possible resilience for Karen: Ways in which her family and community combated these traumatic events or healed following them (e.g. activism, use of Native healing practices)</p>
Ecosystemic	<p>Individual directly experiences trauma from non-traditional sources that are ecosystemic (systemic oppression trauma)</p> <p>Examples: Direct and traumatic experiences of racism (African Americans), heterosexism (LGBT individuals)</p> <p>Possible trauma for Karen: Experiences of sexism, experiences of racism</p> <p>Possible resilience for Karen: Ways in which Karen did or could persist despite systemic oppression (e.g. support from others who have similar identities)</p>	<p>Individual indirectly experiences trauma from non-traditional sources that are ecosystemic (transgenerational systemic oppression trauma)</p> <p>Examples: Children of individuals who have experienced racism (African Americans)</p> <p>Possible trauma for Karen: Maternal family’s or community’s experiences of sexism and racism</p> <p>Possible resilience for Karen: Ways in which her family persisted despite experiences systemic oppression (e.g. cultural pride, retaining cultural practices)</p>

how an individual might have directly experienced trauma, the counselor should also assess for trauma that is passed intergenerationally. While transgenerational trauma is indirect, it may still have a significant impact on an individual's mental health (Danieli, 2007, Dass-Brailsford, 2007). Furthermore, in addition to traditional definitions of trauma, practitioners should incorporate an ecosystemic understanding of trauma that acknowledges the potential for discrimination and racism to be sources of traumatic stress (Carter, 2007; Goodman & West-Olatunji, 2009; Paradies, 2006).

Additionally, a comprehensive understanding of trauma includes identifying the multiple ways in which traumatic stress symptoms may manifest. Through psychoeducation about common symptoms of trauma, the counselor can increase the client's understanding of trauma responses and identify areas of concern for the client. Attention to ways in which trauma has manifested across generations may also be helpful, including the common *conspiracy of silence* in which families do not discuss past trauma in order to protect future generations (Danieli, 2007). Memory problems, avoidance, maladaptive coping, and physical or psychosomatic symptoms should also be explored within counseling to develop a comprehensive understanding of trauma symptoms.

Counselors and psychologists are encouraged to explore the time dimension of trauma with their clients, including things that happened in the past and things that are happening now. Processing of trauma within a temporal framework can be helpful, since the narrative ordering of events may be lacking in traumatic memories (Rothschild, 2000). By addressing the multiple aspects of trauma, practitioners may help elucidate transgenerational aspects of trauma and important patterns among families and communities. This process may also help break the conspiracy of silence and increase communication about how to heal as an individual, family, or community (Danieli, 2007). Counselors and psychologists can use the following questions to facilitate a comprehensive view of trauma:

- What events have occurred in your life (or your family or community) that have been very stressful or traumatic?
- In what ways have you, your family, or your community experienced direct, indirect, traditional, or ecosystemic stress or trauma? [Provide psychoeducation as needed.]
- What do you notice about the way this event (or these events) have impacted you (or your family or your community)? [Follow up: physical, psychological, and cognitive (including memory) symptoms for individual, family, and community. Provide psychoeducation about symptoms as needed.]

These questions are provided as a guide, and are not an exhaustive list of the ways in which to assess for trauma. Counselors and psychologists may wish to use the ecosystemic view of trauma in Table 1 as a guide for ensuring that their trauma assessment is comprehensive.

### ***Strengths-based***

The TTRG focuses explicitly on the sources of resilience and strengths within multiple levels, including the individual, family, and community. While counseling should attend



to the struggles and problems facing clients, counselors and psychologists should also be wary of over-emphasizing deficits. In particular, when working with marginalized populations, there has been a tendency to identify the problems encountered by individuals and to focus on personal or cultural deficits, instead of identifying and promoting the strengths that have helped them persist in oppressive environments (Goodman & West-Olatunji, 2010; Robinson & Biran, 2006).

Counselors and psychologists can promote resilience and healing by focusing explicitly on ways in which an individual, family, or community has (now or in the past) persisted, overcome obstacles, and assisted others in overcoming obstacles. The following can facilitate the exploration of strengths:

- Tell me about yourself (or your family or your community) before the event(s).
- What are your strengths (or those of your family or your community)?
- What challenges have you (or your family or your community) overcome?
- How have you (or your family or your community) maintained your strengths, your culture, or your community in the face of these stressors? Are there internal or personal characteristics, family characteristics, or community characteristics that have helped?

### *Culturally responsive*

Trauma counseling requires an understanding of culture for several reasons. First, it is now well understood that healing and wellness are culturally bound and that culture should be infused into counseling practice (e.g. Duran et al., 2008; Sue & Sue, 2008; Walsh, 2006). Counselors and psychologists who work from a framework that is congruent with a client's culture will have more accurate conceptualizations and more effective counseling practice (West-Olatunji, 2008). Additionally, as noted in the discussion of comprehensive trauma assessment, cultural identity may play a role in trauma victimization (Danieli, 2007). To be culturally responsive, practitioners must be aware of culturally based historical trauma and its ongoing effects (Rybak & Decker-Fitts, 2009). Examples include the history of slavery and legacy of racism for African-Americans (Cross, 1998), as well as the genocide of Native Americans and resulting *soul wound* and ongoing marginalization (Duran et al., 2008). Furthermore, particularly in cases where cultural groups have been targeted for victimization, there can be a loss of culture, including traditional healing practices and language (Danieli, 2007; Nagata, 1990). Therefore, cultural recovery may be integral to trauma recovery.

The TTRG is culturally responsive in that it is client-directed and reflects the personal, familial, cultural, and communal experiences of the client. It does not dictate a family structure based on the nuclear family, or healing practices based solely on a Western or European American framework. Instead, clients create a network of people and resources. This allows for the integration of a collectivistic focus, in which community and familial well-being and sources of strength can be included. The TTRG is flexible, meaning that it can and should reflect the client's cultural perspective at the core of its creation, instead of being an afterthought or adjustment for individuals who "differ" from the dominant European American perspective. It is expected that counselors and psychologists are integrating culture throughout their work with clients; the following questions may be helpful in expanding the discussion of culture within the TTRG:

- When someone in your family or community is upset (or hurt or distressed), what do they do (or who do they talk to or where do they go for help)?
- What are the typical ways that you (or your family or your community) heal or get better after something difficult?
- What does “being well” look like to you (or your family or your community)? What would it mean to get better for you (or your family or your community)?
- What stories did you hear from your family or community about your family or community history? How did these influence how you see yourself or the world?

### ***Social justice considerations***

Historically, counseling has focused on intrapsychic factors, ignoring significant ecosystemic factors that impact mental health (Lewis, Lewis, Daniels, & D’Andrea, 2011). Counselors and psychologists using the TTRG can incorporate a critical or liberatory perspective to identify and deconstruct ways in which clients have experienced oppression, which is particularly important in trauma counseling given the inherent sociopolitical factors (Freire, 2000; Martín-Baró, 1994). As discussed, marginalized individuals and communities are more vulnerable to trauma and also experience greater barriers to trauma recovery due to a confluence of sociopolitical factors (Halpern & Tramontin, 2007), including socioeconomic resources and discrimination based on facets of identity (e.g. ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, nationality). Sociopolitical considerations intersect with culturally responsive practices and historical trauma due to the history of ecosystemic trauma among culturally diverse communities. The examples for Native Americans and African-Americans mentioned above are relevant here, as well as hate crimes against LGBT youth and gender-based violence against women.

Indeed, it is critical that counselors and psychologists understand and incorporate the ecosystemic factors that impact their clients and influence their lived experiences (Salazar & Costa, 2008). Advocacy and social action can be important in trauma healing (Herman, 1997). Active protest has been correlated with positive social functioning, linking resilience with sociopolitical action (Kupelian, Kalayjian, & Kassabian, 1998). While social action may be considered, the counselor should not dictate such action; empowerment and regaining a sense of control are central to trauma recovery, so any decision to participate in social action must be the client’s (Herman, 1997). Facilitating the inclusion of social justice requires a counselor to work collaboratively with the client to identify ways in which the client, or the client’s family or community, might be marginalized. The following are topics to consider, both historically and in the current context:

- disparities in access to or quality of resources, such as public health, education, or post-disaster recovery;
- public discourse (e.g. media, political rhetoric) that is disparaging or stereotypical;
- legislation and policies that prevent access, promote discrimination, or otherwise marginalize (e.g. anti-immigrant legislation, amendments defining marriage as between a man and woman); and
- lack of representation in positions of power, including public agencies, elected offices, and educational institutions.

When discussing oppression, it is critical to identify and deconstruct the oppressive forces that are causing marginalization (Freire, 2000). For instance, psychologists and counselors can help identify and “problematicize” (Freire, 2006, p. 120) dominant narratives that have been used to define and mischaracterize oppressed groups. Problematization involves examining dominant narratives seen as common knowledge from a critical perspective that investigates where and from whom this view originated, the accuracy or inaccuracy of this narrative, and who benefits from and who is harmed by this narrative. Without problematization, the discussion will only appear to address marginalization, while actually perpetuating oppression by giving the impression that oppression is an inherent characteristic of people, instead of imposed by external forces.

These guiding principles of the TTRG make it a unique tool for counselors and psychologists to conduct assessment and intervention around issues of trauma that cross generations and include ecosystemic sources of trauma. Certainly, the use of the TTRG must be customized to an individual client, family, or community to ensure that it is meaningful and can facilitate healing. Below is a case illustration of how a counselor might use the TTRG with an individual client. The case is a fictional compilation of the author’s experience in trauma counseling.

### **Case illustration of the TTRG**

“Karen” is a 21-year-old female. She identifies as white; her father is European American and her mother is of European American and Native American descent. She presented for counseling at a counseling center after a tornado had hit her hometown several weeks earlier. She reported that she is having trouble concentrating, feels anxious, and is worried about her ability to function in school and in her part-time job that she uses to fund her education. She also feels unsupported by her peers, and reports frequent fights with friends.

In exploring the client’s background further, the counselor identified that Karen had several salient factors that might be impacting or exacerbating her reaction to the most recent traumatic event of the tornado. Karen reported that five years ago, her mother and father divorced after her mother had a long (four-year) struggle with depression and serious physical illness, which doctors expected to be fatal but was not. Karen’s father and his family attributed her mother’s mental and physical health problems to weakness of character and attempts to get attention. Her father’s family had never been accepting of her mother, making disparaging comments about her maternal Native American ancestry. Karen’s father’s family viewed Native American culture as inferior and the cultural traditions that Karen’s mother carried with her as strange and “backwards.” Karen reported that her father continues to denigrate her mother, tells Karen that she is just like her mother, and verbally attacks Karen, calling her over-sensitive and unattractive.

In discussing her experiences, Karen became agitated, angry, and sometimes tearful. Karen’s emotional reactivity was congruent with her history of traumatic experiences and ongoing conflict with her father; however, Karen had limited insight about the connections between her psychological symptoms and these triggering events. The insight that she did have, in terms of reporting the hurtful things that her father said to her, was restricted to seeing herself a victim of unfair circumstances, without awareness of her own strengths and ability to persist in that environment. The counselor also noted

that some of the sources of Karen’s pain could be related to transgenerational and sociopolitical factors, including the marginalization of Native Americans and the view of women in society.

The counselor decided to use the TTRG as a tool within the trauma counseling process to: (a) increase Karen’s insight about the factors impacting her and (b) identify and promote Karen’s strengths. Using the TTRG, the counselor could incorporate sources of pain and of resilience that were present across generations, were culturally relevant, and were related to sociopolitical issues. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of some of the elements explored with Karen using the TTRG. Aspects of the counseling process that relate to the use of the TTRG are described below; the focus is on transgenerational trauma, although additional aspects noted were explored in counseling.

To create the TTRG, the counselor and Karen used the basic form for a traditional genogram (McGoldrick et al., 2008) overlaid with Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) ecological model. This process started with Karen drawing herself and her family members in a somewhat traditional genogram structure (for clarity, Figure 1 includes aspects of the

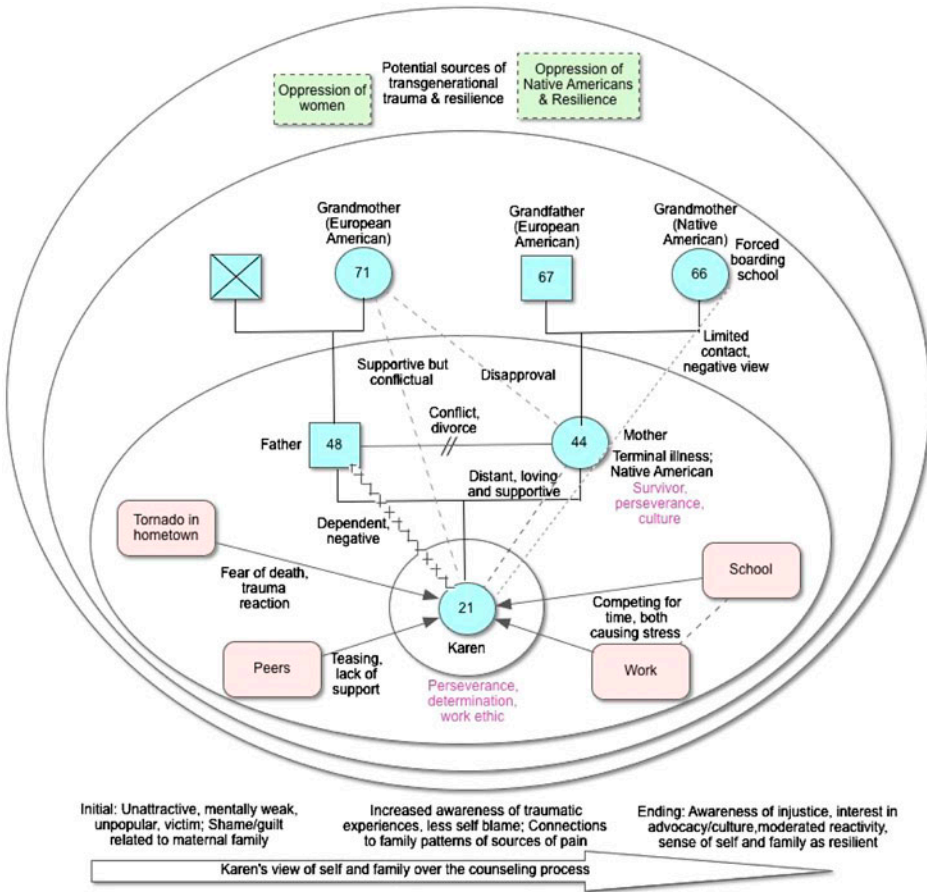


Figure 1. Example of the TTRG developed for the case illustration of ‘Karen.’

TTRG that are relevant to this discussion). Using the idea of distal and proximal factors, the counselor asked Karen to then place the factors that impacted her directly closer to her, while those factors that impacted her indirectly were further away, thereby overlaying the framework for an ecological model on the genogram structure and allowing the genogram to expand beyond just the traditional family of origin elements. To further the depiction, the counselor then asked Karen to note anything salient about the relationship between herself and any of the factors. Family members, aspects of the traditional genogram, were included, as well as any factors (people, places, things) that Karen identified, thereby expanding on the conception of a genogram. As proximal factors, Karen identified the hurtful and conflictual relationship with her father. She also reported a distant relationship with her mother since her mother had moved to a different state after the divorce; Karen felt a mix of sadness and appreciation in part because she and her mother had been close but now her mother lived in another state and was not easily accessible.

As distal factors, Karen identified an ambivalent relationship with her paternal grandmother who disparaged Karen's mother but also provided love and support to Karen. Karen's maternal grandparents were also distal factors. Karen reported that she had limited contact with them due to her father's disapproval of them and their location in another state. Karen knew some about them from her mother, and also that her father and his family viewed them as inferior. She felt a sense of aversion and shame when she thought about them, as well as some guilt and sadness for these feelings and the distance between them.

The counselor then asked Karen to consider if there were any relationships between the factors that she had drawn. Consistent with ecological counseling (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), it is assumed that there are interactions between the systemic factors in which individuals interact. Karen identified that both her paternal grandmother and her father's conflict with her mother created greater tension between Karen and her mother. She often felt shameful when being compared to her mother, and also felt guilty for the feelings of shame. This aspect laid the groundwork for further exploration of transgenerational elements that might be impacting the client.

An important aspect of the TTRG process is to connect intergenerational and systemic issues with the client's personal experiences. As such, the counselor next wanted to have Karen focus on her understanding of herself within the context she had elucidated. The counselor hypothesized that Karen's negative feelings about herself were related to some of the systemic factors identified on the TTRG, as well as larger societal factors not yet explored. Karen shared that she saw herself as unattractive, mentally weak, and unpopular with peers – overwhelmingly negative descriptors that Karen agreed to examine using the TTRG. Karen noted the link between the first two descriptors and her father's messages about Karen and her mother; this provided Karen with a bit of relief as she was able to identify the source of these thoughts, instead of only having free-floating pain.

The counselor used the TTRG to further explore these intergenerational messages by broadening the perspective to include her relationship with her mother and her maternal family. Prior to her mother's illness, Karen and her mother had been close, and her mother was her primary caregiver. Karen shared that her mother's Native American heritage was important to her mother. She would often tell Karen stories that were passed down from her Native American family, both about the struggles and cultural

traditions. Karen and the counselor examined her experiences through the lens of transgenerational trauma and resilience. While she struggled to remember many details, Karen was aware of stories her mother told her about Karen's grandmother attending a boarding school for Native children. The purpose of such boarding schools was to assimilate Native children into European American culture and rid them of the Native language and cultural practices (Smith, 2007). Such schools were often sources of trauma for Native children, including the separation from their parents, devaluing of their heritage, and even physical abuse in some cases. They were also sources of trauma for the entire Native community, and contributed to the destruction of Native culture, called a *soul wound* (Evans-Campbell, 2008; Smith, 2007). These elements were added to the TTRG to further explicate Karen's understanding of her mother and her mother's family, as well as how this might influence Karen herself.

Having identified some of the traumatic experiences in Karen's life and family history, the counselor shifted the focus to attend to ecosystemic and social justice issues. First, she explored how the historical oppression of the Native American community may have created transgenerational trauma for Karen's mother and maternal grandmother. They discussed some of the ways in which current day marginalization of the community may have manifested in Karen's life, including in the strained relationship between the two sides of her family, and in Karen's father's disparaging comments directed both at Karen and at her mother. This led to a broader exploration about her father's hurtful words that incorporated how he was enacting sexist stereotypes in his behavior with Karen. Karen realized that she had also received these messages about female worth being based on appearance from society as well, and that this may have contributed to her insecurity. Notations were added to the TTRG to connote Karen's thoughts about these elements, and to visually represent the connections from ecosystemic messages to her current experiences, thus contextualizing her experiences.

The last phase of counseling focused on identifying and developing strengths. As often happens when individuals endure oppression (Freire, 2000), Karen had begun to internalize the negative and stereotyped depictions and expectations. After having a clearer understanding of the ecosystemic issues that might be relevant in her life, Karen was able to shift from self-blame to a more critical and liberatory perspective of the world around her. In counseling, she was able to identify strengths both of herself and of her family. She noted her mother's own strength when faced with a terminal illness, conflict within her marriage and family, and possibly transgenerational trauma from her own mother. Karen also began to connect with the stories of perseverance among the Native community that her mother had told her as a child. Karen saw the resilience evident in her own struggle to continue her education despite limited financial resources and the stress of working and going to school. Karen made notes in a different color on the TTRG to describe the strengths she saw in herself and in her mother.

As they ended counseling, Karen reported to the counselor that she felt she had a clearer picture of the factors impacting her and her family. It appeared that the ecosystemic view of trauma facilitated by the TTRG helped Karen to see the relationship between her presenting problem and the underlying and intergenerational factors of trauma that she had experienced. The counselor asked Karen to depict how she saw herself at the beginning, middle, and end of their work together, using Bronfenbrenner's time dimension (chronosystem) at the bottom of the TTRG to depict this. For Karen, who was feeling overwhelmed by negative emotions and experiences and who had

multiple and interrelated traumatic experiences, the TTRG was useful in elucidating these factors and also helping to cultivate strengths and a sense of resilience. Karen also developed a new curiosity about her family, and indicated a desire to explore the ideas of transgenerational trauma and resilience with her mother and possibly her grandmother. As such, the counseling process might have implications beyond Karen's own experience; Karen might use the understanding that she developed to connect with her own family and possibly engender healing and resilience among other family members. Karen also spoke about the possibility of connecting to the school's Native student association, another avenue for her own cultural identity development and possibly social action.

Overall, the TTRG functioned as an important tool in counseling with Karen. Counseling with Karen lasted 18 sessions and included the attention to the intersections between transgenerational factors discussed here and the additional concerns Karen raised. The use of the TTRG allowed the counselor to systemically explore various factors impacting Karen that were related to both her current presenting problem and underlying factors, from a transgenerational trauma and resilience perspective. Karen's presenting problem was alleviated in part by exploring the connection to ecosystemic factors. She also developed a sense of personal identity that was strength-based, and began to connect to sources of strength and resilience within her family and culture. The TTRG helped Karen to see herself as a resilient person who had and could continue to persist in difficult situations, and who had familial and cultural sources of strength on which to draw.

## Discussion

### *Implications for training and practice*

The TTRG and its guiding principles have a number of implications for the training and practice of trauma counseling. Counselors and psychologists must themselves become more aware of the sociopolitical histories and forms of transgenerational and systemic oppression trauma that their clients may have experienced. Increasingly, resources are available for practitioners to educate themselves on these topics (see Carter, 2007; Danieli, 1998). These aspects of trauma, while not included in the *DSM-IV-TR*, are increasingly recognized as legitimate and important aspects of an individual's and a community's lived experiences (Dass-Brailsford, 2007). As such, counselors and psychologists must expand their understanding of trauma, as well as their knowledge and ability, to integrate these aspects of trauma, perhaps using tools such as the TTRG.

The TTRG may also have implications for the education of counselors and psychologists. Increasingly, there is awareness that practitioners need to be trained to respond to disaster, crisis, and trauma. For instance, the revised Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs Standards (CACREP, 2009) require students to be trained to understand and respond to trauma. Further, practitioners and students need to learn how to infuse both multiculturalism and social justice ideals throughout their counseling, and particularly within trauma counseling. A task force convened by the International Society for Traumatic Stress published guidelines for trauma counselor training that prominently featured the importance of cultural awareness and contextual factors, such as political issues and social injustices (Weine et al., 2002). Using the

TTRG as a teaching tool in counseling training courses can facilitate an ecosystemic perspective of post-trauma counseling.

Further, from an ecosystemic lens, justice and social action are critical pieces in trauma recovery (Danieli, 2007; Herman, 1997). As such, counselors and psychologists are called on to find ways to advocate for their clients and for appropriate counseling services. The TTRG and its guiding principles can facilitate the client and counselor working together to identify avenues to seek justice or to take social action. The counselor may have access to resources within the counseling profession that can make a systemic change. For instance, counselors and psychologists might note a lack of resources or a lack of practitioners with the appropriate linguistic or cultural skills to meet a community's needs. Practitioners and community members could discuss strategies for addressing such problems, including having the community identify members interested in counseling as a career or partnering to create a counseling clinic within the community (Goodman, Calderon, & Tate, in press).

As noted, the TTRG is a useful tool for counselors and psychologists interested in incorporating the aspects discussed to promote an ecosystemic view of trauma counseling. When deciding to use this tool, there are a number of factors to consider. First, clients who share complex and multilayered histories, which are quite common, may benefit from this tool that allows for visual depiction and promotes greater clarity. Further, clients that are experiencing some aspect of marginalization can benefit from the TTRG since the overlay of the ecological model promotes the consideration of ecosystemic factors that might otherwise remain out of awareness of either the client or the counselor. This tool enables the client and counselor to depict and examine these factors, which are present in most, if not all, clients' lives.

In considering how and when to use the TTRG, counselors and psychologists may decide to create the tool along with the client as a way of noting and making sense of the topics explored in counseling. This is particularly helpful for clients who are visual learners, and it may serve to engender a sense of empowerment and co-creation throughout the counseling process. Depending on a client's preference for structure or flexibility, the counselor can explain the basic framework of the TTRG (including the genogram symbols and ecological spheres), but also enable the client to create a structure that fits her or his worldview. Practitioners might also use this tool without the client if the client is not receptive or interested in co-creating the TTRG. In such cases, the counselor can still use the TTRG as a guide for treatment and to ensure that discussion in sessions address the important factors laid out by the TTRG's guiding principles.

When using the TTRG, reflective questions for a counselor to ask of herself or himself include: Have I assessed for any underlying trauma, including personal, family, community, or cultural group? Have I identified the strengths of my client, my client's family or community, and my client's culture or context? What are the relevant sociopolitical issues that might be impacting my client (or my client's family, community, cultural group)? While the ecological model provides a tool for multilevel assessments, counselors and psychologists need to integrate a social justice perspective within the model so that counseling can serve to deconstruct injustice and oppression (Martín-Baró, 1994).

The TTRG offers a tool that client and counselor can use collaboratively to address each of these aspects. The use of a concrete, visual tool such as the TTRG facilitates



client and counselor understanding of these multiple aspects impacting the client and the interconnections between them. In working with trauma, these elements are particularly important for several reasons: (a) thorough and multidimensional assessment enables counseling conceptualization and intervention to be more comprehensive and more effective; (b) collaborative counseling interventions engender collaborative relationships and empower clients; and (c) visual tools can help clients make sense of fragmented experiences and memories, create narrative memory, and develop clarity about overwhelming experiences, feelings, and factors.

Each trauma has many unique characteristics in terms of both the impact as well as avenues for recovery. In addition to using the TTRG with an individual, as discussed here, the TTRG and its guiding principles may be applied to community trauma as well, such as disaster response following a flood or outreach to a marginalized community. When working with events that impact an entire community, the prompts used above can be tailored to involve small or large groups of individuals within the community. Practitioners may work with small groups to create community TTRGs, and then bring these together for the community as a whole.

Additionally, the TTRG can help practitioners working with individuals, families, or groups to examine resilience from a transgenerational perspective, including the patterns and mechanisms for coping across generations. While resilience is likely passed down, there are often strategies and ways of functioning that worked in the past but are not longer useful in the same form (Danieli, 2007). Felsen (1998) described how following the Holocaust, the Jewish community emphasized family in order to regain their community and maintain safety. While an important form of resilience, closed family systems can prevent individuation and connection to those outside of the family. Therefore, flexibility as well as reflection by the client on strengths and ways of coping should be encouraged in the counseling process. This should not serve to pathologize or extinguish a cultural value or mechanism for coping; instead, the purpose is to build on the historical strength and adjust it to be useful to the current context.

Given that the TTRG purposely focuses on complexity and examining multilayered issues, time constraints in counseling may be a limitation for its use. In this case, the counselor might assign exploration of topics as homework for the client. The counselor could also decide to focus only on one part of the TTRG, but this may limit its utility. Further, some clients may not wish to explore underlying issues or may not endorse that systemic issues are impacting their presenting problems. In these cases, the TTRG may not be helpful to use collaboratively with the client, although the counselor may still wish to use it as a tool for comprehensive case conceptualization.

### ***Implications for research***

Of interest in future research would be to examine the effectiveness of the TTRG in counseling. Effectiveness could include a variety of measures, such as reduction in trauma symptoms (e.g. reactivity) or other related mental health symptoms (e.g. anxiety, depression), and improvement in narrative memory. Effectiveness might also include an assessment of resilience – how and in what ways does the TTRG help clients develop resilience, and how is this resilience manifested? Furthermore, researchers can explore the ways in which the TTRG might be effective with families or whole communities, in

addition to individuals. Research administered over a longer period of time could determine the longitudinal effects as well.

Future research should also explore how the TTRG can be adapted to the concerns, backgrounds, and experiences of different individuals, families, or communities. Researchers could examine what aspects of the TTRG and its guiding principles are especially effective for different groups of people. Differences might be found for clients with different cultural backgrounds, different presenting problems, different traumatic symptoms, or in different contexts. A set of recommendations or best practices for use of the TTRG could be developed that would allow counselors and psychologists to use such a tool for different purposes, such as disaster response, individual counseling, or family counseling.

In summary, the TTRG represents a tool that can enable counselors and psychologists to engage in a comprehensive, ecosystemic counseling process with individuals, families, or communities who have experienced trauma. The TTRG helps practitioners explore the contextual factors impacting clients in a way that can allow for greater insight, promote resilience and healing, and incorporate salient cultural and social justice factors. As such, clients may be better able to address the sources of their pain, and better able to access resources or strengths to help them persist and thrive.

### Notes on contributors

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