Western Kentucky University
TopSCHOLAR®

Counseling & Student Affairs Faculty Publications | Counseling and Student Affairs

1-1-2009

The Basic Needs Genogram: A Tool to Help Inter-religious Couples Negotiate

Dr. Jill D. Duba
Western Kentucky University, jill.duba@wku.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/csa_fac_pub

Part of the Health Psychology Commons, Personality and Social Contexts Commons, and the Student Counseling and Personnel Services Commons

Recommended Repository Citation
Duba, Dr. Jill D., "The Basic Needs Genogram: A Tool to Help Inter-religious Couples Negotiate" (2009). *Counseling & Student Affairs Faculty Publications.* Paper 27.
http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/csa_fac_pub/27

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by TopSCHOLAR®. It has been accepted for inclusion in Counseling & Student Affairs Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of TopSCHOLAR®. For more information, please contact connie.foster@wku.edu.

Running head: A TOOL TO HELP INTER-RELIGIOUS COUPLES NEGOTIATE

The Basic Needs Genogram: A Tool to Help Inter-religious Couples Negotiate

Jill D. Duba, Ph.D., LPCC, MFTA, NCC

Associate Professor

Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Room 417B

Western Kentucky University, 1906 College Heights Blvd., #51031

Bowling Green, KY 42101-1031

jill.duba@wku.edu; Office: 270.745.4799

Abstract

The purpose of this of this article is two-fold. First, a brief review of the unique characteristics of inter-religious couples, as well as the common negotiations made in such relationships will be provided. Secondly, salient counseling implications will be presented, with the introduction of the Basic Needs Genogram as a possible technique in working with inter-religious couples. A case conceptualization and discussion will follow.

The Basic Needs Genogram: A Tool to Help Inter-religious Couples Negotiate

Consider the following example. Jane has a high need for power. She satisfies this need by serving on various church committees throughout the year. When she is unable to attend those committees, or feels guilty about how much time she is dedicating, she may experience dissonance between her need for power and her inability to serve or her choice to feel guilty (respectfully). Jane is married to Joe. Joe's need for power, on the other hand is quite low. However, his need for love and belonging is very high (higher than Jane's). Joe is a Humanist and does not practice in an organized religion. Although he can appreciate Jane's dedication to church; he has begun to complain to her about all of the time she spends on Sunday at church. He feels "threatened" and "deserted." She responds by feeling guilty and becoming angry at Joe. They both agree they need counseling.

The above example involves more intricacies than it appears to present. Consequently Professional Counselors are behooved to consider the complexities involved in working with inter-religious couples. First, a general understanding of the challenges couples face, and the negotiations needed to maintain a successful relationship is required. Secondly, counselors should be willing to educate themselves about various religious backgrounds whenever they are working with someone whose life is informed by his or her faith (Duba, 2008). In addition, counselors should be aware of appropriate techniques that are suitable for the religious related challenge or conflict.

The purpose of this of this article is two-fold. First, a brief review of the unique characteristics of inter-religious couples, as well as the common negotiations made in such relationships will be provided. Secondly, salient counseling implications will be presented, with

the introduction of the Basic Needs Genogram as a possible technique in working with inter-religious couples. A case conceptualization and discussion will follow.

Inter-religious Couples

The frequency of inter-religious marriages is on the rise. For example, a survey conducted in 2001 suggested that in one partner in every 23% of Catholic marriages, 33% of Protestant marriages, 27% of Jewish marriages, and 21% of Muslim marriages does not identify with that particular religious faith (Kosmin, Mayer & Keysar, 2001). Albeit the number of inter-religious marriages in the United States is a minority compared to religious homogenous relationships, Professional Counselors are behooved to understand the complexities of such couples.

Many studies suggest that inter-religious couples tend to experience less marital satisfaction than their counterparts (Lehrer, 1999; Parsons, Nalbone, Killmer, & Wetchler, 2007). If one is aware of the factors found to be associated with marital satisfaction, this becomes clearer. Consider the following: communication, moral values, faith in God, forgiveness, equity, togetherness, intimacy, love, sexual intimacy and commitment (Bryant, Conger, & Meehan, 2001; Fincham & Beach, 2002; Frame, 2004; Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 1999). Religious tenets and faith perspectives can provide benchmarks or standards, if you will, for many of the above mentioned factors.

The sexual dimension of a religious couple's relationship often is informed by their faith. For example, guidelines for sexual intimacy are clearly defined by the Catholic Church. That is, every act of marital intercourse should be one that is open to new life. Further, it is a context for both partners to become one loving organism where each is giving oneself freely to the other (Duba Onedera, 2008). However, this matter becomes complex if a Catholic is married to a

Protestant. Both Liberal and Conservative Protestants tend to believe that there is not a biblical condemnation of contraception (Zink, 2008). How an inter-religious communicates and negotiates their sexual relationship will factor into their overall marital satisfaction.

The degree of perceived equity may differ in couples whom share varying religious viewpoints. For example, Islamic teachings give direction for role equity. Partners may be perceived as "equals" in the marital relationship, however their role expectations within the marital, as well as family unit differ (Altareb, 2008). When an individual is informed by his or her religious traditions and guidelines, and is unwilling or unable to negotiate with his or her partner's different set of religious tenets, it is no wonder why the marital satisfaction dwindles.

Religious beliefs also inform persons about how to resolve moral decisions. Sharing similar beliefs unites couples and can make for an ease in decision making that inter-religious couples may not benefit from. For example, the typical view of abortion from a Liberal Protestant Christian standpoint is that the individual's right to make a responsible, prayerful decision regarding the termination of pregnancy should be honored. Consequently, decisions made between two Liberal Protestant Christian partners versus one Liberal Protestant Christian partner and a Buddhist partner would be quite different, with the latter's decision making process being much more complicated. The complexities of decision making between partners being informed by two different religious perspectives can be challenging, tiresome, and may lead to resentment.

Religious persons also tend to participate in religious related activities. This can become exigent for inter-religious couples, however. Consider the challenges of negotiating the celebration and attendance of different religious holiday functions together (i.e., Christmas, Hanukah). How will Jewish and Christian partners negotiate what religious symbols are

displayed in the house in December? How will the Christian partner respect and honor the meaning his/her Jewish partner ascribes to Hanukah especially in a society where this holiday is held second to Christmas? How will a Christian partner participate in Hanukah related activities without feeling that his/her Christian identity is being threatened; how does this impact the relationship?

There is not enough space to address the multiple complexities that inter-religious couples may encounter. What appears to be significant however is the degree to which partners align with the tenets of their religion and their ability to negotiate and show respect for each other's beliefs. Lehrer and Chiswick (1993) suggested that it is not whether or not partners are of the same religion or denomination, but rather how compatible they were upon marrying. This compatibility "dominates any adverse effects of differences in the religious background" (p. 400). This suggests that during the counseling process it may be helpful to inquire about how couples came to such agreements or negotiations upon marrying.

The Counseling Process: The Essential Elements

Basic Treatment Goals

The goal of treatment when working with inter-religious couples may best be focused on helping couples learn how to work and talk through the particular problem, rather than solving it. Religious differences are likely to be "perpetual;" that is, issues that may never be solved per say. Gottman (1998) underscores the importance of finding ways to talk about these "perpetual problems." More specifically, coming to an understanding of the meaning each person ascribes to his/her position is what counts. Consequently, the treatment goals should move couples to a place where they can enter and maintain a conversation about the differences impacted by their varying religious perspectives, rather than trying to conform to the other's position.

When communicating about differences or perpetual problems, it is important that couples maintain particular stances. Such stances include a state of curiosity, interest, openness and flexibility (Biever, Bobele, & North, 1998). Further, partners must be willing to negotiate while being able to mentally reorganize their religious experiences and beliefs in a manner that allows space for another perspective (Lara & Duba Onedera, 2008; Waldman, 2005). Couples should be asked to verbally agree to the above mentioned stances both inside and outside of the counseling context. The Professional Counselor also should inform the couple that when she/he perceives that one individual is breaking the agreement, an intervention will be made. Such an intervention might include a gentle encourager or, asking the partner to reestablish him- or herself by taking a deep breathe or re-visiting the overall counseling goals.

The Basic Needs Genogram: A Tool for Exploring Meaning behind the Religious Conflict

Generally speaking, genograms provide a springboard for conversation about one's family history and experiences. Through the use of this technique, clients, as well as their counselors can begin to identify patterns of behaviors, values, and attitudes across generations (Duba, Graham, Britzman, & Minatrea, 2009, p. 16). Such awareness often promotes behavioral changes and behavioral shifts on the part of clients. When using a Basic Needs Genogram, clients become further acquainted with how their family history has impacted how their own basic needs have developed and are maintained. Further, the Basic Needs Genogram is a tool that can motivate persons to consider about how their "picture albums" have been formed and maintained throughout generational lines. These "picture albums" hold images of how one wishes to satisfy the five basic needs; love and belonging, power, freedom, fun and enjoyment, and survival. A person is most "healthy" if you will, when their basic needs are being met (Duba

et al., 2009). Further, choices (behaving, thinking, feeling, and physiologicing) are made to meet these needs.

Inter-religious Couples

Wubbolding (1988) suggests that marital discord is directly related to an incongruence or lack of commonality between and among the wants or "picture albums" of each partner. Further, this discord is maintained by either or both of two conditions. First, one partner wants the other partner to complement his or her own pictures. Second, this individual (the one wanting the harmony) is unwilling to change this want. This is clearly noted in the case of Jane and Joe mentioned at the beginning of this article.

The use of a Basic Needs Genogram in a religious context can serve two objectives. First, this technique can bring about greater awareness of how the strength of any given basic need has been formed and impacted by the individual's religious affiliation and beliefs, specifically in the context of family patterns and expectations. Secondly, the Genogram sheds light on how religion informs individuals within the family about how to meet those basic needs. That is, the relevant question being, what religious hints or clues are contained in the family "picture albums?"

Comparing and contrasting each partner's Basic Needs Genogram can lead to change in the marital relationship. An encouraging counselor can challenge each partner to challenge and modify his or her own "picture albums" in ways that bring greater accord to the overall relationship (Duba et al., 2009). This can be done by restructuring the need strength of any of the five basic needs by reevaluating the following: (a) how one's personal religious beliefs and values (versus the consideration of only those expected within a family context) impact one's basic need strength, (b) the congruence between family expectations and one's personal incorporation of religion into his or her life; and (c) how the basic needs are currently helping

him or her get what is wanted in the marriage. Finally, partners may develop new "pictures" based on the restructuring of needs or upon developing similar activities or ways of getting their individual needs met.

In summary, individuals are moved to consider new processes or new pictures that continue to have individual and personal meaning within a religious context. However clients also are encouraged to examine how they may have unconsciously "adopted" meaning or patterns from the family system which are neither helpful nor supportive of the current relationship. For the remainder of this article, an inter-religious couple (without any identifying information being used) will be presented to illustrate how the Basic Needs Genogram can be used as a tool to break the dissonance between both partners.

Case Example

Evan and Annie were married four years ago in a large Catholic wedding. Annie grew up in a very tight knit Catholic family. In fact, even during her marriage, she attended weekend mass with her parents. Christian holy days and holidays such as Good Friday, Easter, and Christmas were spent with extended family members. Further, big celebrations were held in honor of those members receiving the sacraments of baptism, communion, and marriage. It was normal to have at least 300 attendees at any given wedding. Not only was the family connected through such religious traditions, but Annie remarked that there is this "invisible undertone that God holds us all together; crosses and other symbols are usually in every room of everyone's home. You just know you are all in it together, one big Catholic family that will stay together no matter what." Evan, on the other hand, did not grow up with his faith as intertwined into his family like as Annie's. He called himself a "Reform Jew" and believed that although his faith was "rock solid" he believed that peace between different groups was much more important than

discussing differences and advocating for his position. Evan appreciated how close Annie's family was and wished he came from such a tight family.

Evan and Annie had a very large Catholic wedding which included a Catholic mass, and several Jewish wedding traditions. After the conclusion of the mass, Annie and Evan expressed their marital commitment under a chuppah. The entire ceremony was completed with the Jewish wedding tradition of breaking the glass. Both partners believed that their wedding was an incredible way of symbolically bridging their different faith perspectives.

Presenting Problem

Annie was feeling "disengaged from Evan" and was wondering if they made a "serious mistake in getting married." Annie reported that she resented the fact that Evan would never be able to participate in the mass with her; and that she and him would have to raise their future children in both faith traditions. She also had a difficult time understanding why Evan would not even consider learning more about her faith, especially when he did not seem as committed to Judaism as she was to Catholicism. When asked what her thoughts were about this prior to getting married, Annie remarked that she "was immature and never really thought about it." Evan, on the other hand felt betrayed and was beginning to experience resentment towards Annie for focusing on this four years into the marriage. Further, he was angry as he felt she was implying that his faith and beliefs were "not as important as hers" and although he did not practice Judaism consistently throughout his childhood, it was still an "essential part" of who he was.

Case Conceptualization

The first goal of using a Basic Needs Genogram with Evan and Annie was to explore how the strength of each of their basic needs were formed and impacted by their religious

affiliation and beliefs within a family context. We explored this more in depth by considering how their religious perspectives, again within a family context informed them about how to meet those needs. The arduous process was bringing about change in the marital relationship. Each partner was responsible for considering the restructuring of his or her need strength (based within a more personal religious framework) and whether or not they could use their faith to construct new ways of meeting these needs (namely, the changing of their picture albums).

The religious and family influences on basic need strengths. A review of Annie's need strengths illustrated strong comparisons to most of her close family members. For example, love and belonging was high need for everyone in her immediate family except. Upon exploring her extended family, strong family ties were noted and seemed to extend directly from her maternal grandmother, who was a strong Catholic, and very much loved by every member of the family. In addition, all members of her immediate family, as well as those within her mother's immediate family were practicing Catholics. Annie's need strength for Power and Achievement also was very high. A very strong emphasis on education, career excellence and financial security was present in her family of origin. Annie considered this further and explained that from a religious perspective, she was taught that with prayer and dependence on God, she could do anything. She trusted that. In a sense, she also believed that God wanted certain things for her. "He wants me to be happy." However, she also noted that this drive for power and inner control came at a cost to some of her family members (e.g., having to live far from family due to job, divorce, marriage later in life). Annie reported that despite these negative consequences, everyone in her family managed to work through the challenges and are for the most part, content with their lives. Finally, Fun and Enjoyment also were high on her basic needs. Annie reported that her family was for the most part, a very generous, happy and loving group.

Everyone tried, at least to model good, Catholic values and they had fun doing it! She wanted to continue this.

Evan's Basic Needs Genogram also was revealing. First, he had high need strengths for both Power and Achievement, and Freedom. This was illustrated across the family as well. Everyone in Evan's family was successful in their careers. However, Evan noted that most of his family members (including extended) were not happy, or at least not as happy as he had witnessed Annie's family members to be. He summed this up by saying, "We learned that you just succeeded. That's it. Happiness is not something you need. Just do your work. Help you neighbor and in the mean time, mind your own business." He realized that because of this attitude, it was sometimes difficult for him to understand why Annie was so "bent on being happy all of the time." Freedom was valued by the family as well. Evan believed that being a Reformed Jew allowed for religious freedom, as well as personal freedom.

Personal restructuring and marital modification. The restructuring of basic need strengths and means of satisfying those needs did not occur within one counseling session. It was a process, something that took trial and error in terms of trying new "personalities" on as Annie put it. Annie and Evan played with the details from their Basic Needs Genograms. Annie realized that to a great degree her basic needs were very similar to those of her family. This was okay, however a part of the formation of her needs was very much related to her desire to meet the (nonverbal) expectations of her family. That is, her irritation towards Evan for not participating completing in the rituals of the mass may be related to what she thought others thought of her. What would the other people at Church think about her? What did her family they really think of Evan being Jewish? What did this say about her Catholic identity? Such questions

were based out of fear than fact, however Annie realized that some of her needs were formed based on what she thought was expected from her family.

Evan realized that he never really thought about the meaning of happiness (Fun and Enjoyment) in his own life. This was not a value within his family system; however from witnessing Annie's family, he realized how important this was to *him.* After being a part of the discussion about Annie's need for belonging and love, he commented on how this was "difficult to understand" as it was never something he thought he needed, nor was it expressed as a need in his family.

Annie was not willing to restructure her basic needs; however she was willing to modify a couple of the ways in which she satisfied her needs. For example, she decided that she was choosing to ask herself several harmful questions as she pursued her need to belong to her family, as well as within the Church. So she practiced thought-stopping, and asked Evan if he would be willing to volunteer with her on a church committee. Evan was happy to do so. In addition, Annie realized that her need for Power (and control) could be getting in the way of being happily married to Evan. She realized that she may never have her life in perfect order. She also mentioned that perhaps it was a good time to take a deeper look at her own self-worth and how she allows externals to determine her worth (e.g., how others see her as a wife). She welcomed a referral to an individual counselor.

Evan decided that he wanted to be happier; that was important to him. He decided that volunteering with Annie would be a start. He also came to a greater understanding of why it was important for him to share in the activities of the church and mass with Annie. Although he was not ready to change his belief system, he was willing to shake hands with other parishioners

during the Sign of Peace during mass for example. Evan also agreed to read more about Catholic traditions so that he could at least converse with Annie about them.

The couple was seen for a total of eight sessions. Much of the progress was dependent on each partner's willingness to self-reflect, become vulnerable, and negotiate. The counselor's main task was to remain patient with each partner's process, as well as gently move them to consider other ways of thinking while remaining respectful of the role of religion in each individual's life.

Conclusion

Working with inter-religious couples times time and patience. There are various ways in which to work with couples facing struggles associated with the differences in their faith perspectives. Use of the Basic Needs Genogram, with a religious focus is just one way in which couples can experience greater awareness of their own basic needs and how such needs have been formed within the family system in a religious context. Such awareness is the foundation for negotiation and behavioral change in order to negotiate through religious based differences.

References

Altareb, B. (2008). The practice of marriage and family counseling and Islam. In J. D. Duba Onedera (Ed.), *The role of religion and marriage and family counseling* (pp. 89-104). New York: Taylor and Francis.

Biever, J. L., Bobele, M., & North, M. (1998). Therapy with intercultural couples: A postmodern approach. *Counseling Psychology Quarterly, 11*(2), 181-188.

Bryant, C. M., Conger, R. D., & Meehan, J. M. (2001). The influence of in-laws on change in marital success. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 63*, 614-626.

Duba, J. D., Graham, M., Britzman, M., & Minatrea, N. (2009, Spring). Introducing the "basic needs genogram" in reality therapy-based marriage and family counseling. *International Journal of Reality Therapy, (28)*2, 15-19.

Duba Onedera, J. D. (2008). The practice of marriage and family counseling and Catholicism. In J. D. Duba Onedera (Ed.), *The role of religion and marriage and family counseling*. New York, NY: Taylor and Francis.

Fincham, F. D., & Beach, S. R. H. (2002). Forgiveness in marriage: Implications for psychological aggression and constructive communication. *Personal Relationships, 9*, 239-251.

Frame, M. W. (2004). The challenges of intercultural marriage: Strategies for pastoral care. *Pastoral Psychology, 52*(3), 219-232.

Gottman, J. (1998). *The marriage clinic: A scientifically based marital therapy.* New York: Norton & Company.

Kosmin, B. A., Mayer, E., & Keysar, A. (2001). *American religious indentification survey*. New York: Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

Lara, T., & Duba Onedera, J. D. (2008). Inter-religion marriages. In J. D. Duba Onedera (Ed.), *The role of religion and marriage and family counseling*. New York, NY: Taylor and Francis.

Lehrer, E. L., & Chiswick, C. U. (1993). Religion as a determinant of marital stability. *Demography, 30*, 385-403.

Parsons, R. N., Nalbone, D. P., Killmer, J. M., & Wetchler, J. L. (2007). Identity development, differentiation, personal authority, and degree of religiosity as predictors of interfaith marital satisfaction. *The American Journal of Family Therapy, 35*, 343-361.

Waldman, K. (2006). Psychotherapy with intercultural couples: A contemporary psychodynamic approach. *American Journal of Psychotherapy, 59*(3), 227-245.

Weigel, D. J., & Ballard-Reisch, D. S. (1999). The influence of marital duration on the use of relationship maintenance behaviors. *Communication Reports, 12*(2), 59-70.

Wubbolding, R. E. (1988). *Using reality therapy.* New York: Harper & Row.

Zink, D. W. (2008). The practice of marriage and family counseling and conservative Christianity. In J. D. Duba Onedera (Ed.), *The role of religion and marriage and family counseling* (pp. 55-72). New York: Taylor and Francis.