

FAMILIES OF ORIGIN: CONSTRUCTING A GENOGRAM

Brent Satterly

This lesson provides participants with an opportunity to explore the impact their Families of Origin (FoO) have had on their positive and challenging experience(s) of self and others, especially around racial and sexual orientation identities. Specifically, participants will create a genogram, a type of psychological family tree where they map FoO generations, including critical FoO events, family legacies, and loyalty conflicts. Exploring FoOs will allow participants to identify both risk and protective factors within their families.

KEYWORDS

Relationship Styles
Relationships
Sexual/Relationship
Values
Social Supports
Trauma

THEME

Family &
Relationships

FORMAT

Workshop

TIME

120 minutes



PREPARATION

The facilitator(s) should use this section to prepare for the lesson.

PREPARATION

WHY THIS LESSON IS IMPORTANT FOR BLACK MEN

The intersectionality of racism and homophobia/biphobia presents unique challenges for Black Men who have Sex with Men (BMSM). Social supports, specifically families, have been found to serve as protective buffers to these forms of oppression. However, researchers (Saleh, van den Berg, Chambers, & Operario, 2016) have found in their study of social supports that the majority of BMSM participants reported limited ability to depend on their families for either emotional or material support. Indeed, the “[dominant narrative] from participants revealed a pervasive sense of resignation regarding the willingness and capacity of family members to provide assistance, guidance or advice” (Saleh et al, 2016, p. 553). Subsequently, this finding reinforced previous research findings that the limited support of family increased greater financial hardships and social discrimination, which have been associated with greater HIV risk (Ayala, Bingham, Kim, Wheeler, & Millett, 2012; Lauby, Marks, Bingham, Liu, Liao, Stueve, & Millett, 2012; Schneider, Michaels, & Bouris, 2012). It is important to note, however, a subset of BMSM participants did report significant positive messages from family, describing them as their “number one fan,” who emboldened them to “follow their dreams” (p. 553). As a result, these emotionally supportive relationships with family helped the participants pursue their personal goals, including plans to achieve those goals. Because few studies have explored the role of positive Black familial relationships in HIV prevention programs with BMSM, providing lesson participants with the opportunity to examine their FoO in this context may reveal:

- protective factors they wish to increase in their FoO, Future Families, or Families of Choice, and
- gaps they wish to fill in order to improve their well-being and decrease HIV risk.

GOAL

Participants will increase their knowledge and awareness of their own Families of Origin.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, participants will be able to:

- Construct a genogram with at least two generations.
- Describe at least two challenging dynamics of their Family of Origin relationships listed in the genogram, specifically in relation to themselves.
- Describe at least two potential positive dynamics of their Family of Origin relationships listed in the genogram, specifically in relation to themselves.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The intended delivery setting for this lesson can vary (i.e. individual setting, couples, or groups); however, recommended settings include community-based organizational spaces, clinics, and/or office space. This lesson can be conducted with both small (5+) and large (10+) groups with reasonable ease. In addition, while there can be more than one person facilitating the lesson, one person should be able to facilitate it effectively as well. *(Sometimes multiple facilitators can provide a variety of diverse perspectives. Be sure to assess the qualifications of each facilitator including having sufficient discussions in advance about sharing the training floor appropriately.)*

KEY TERMS

Genogram: a family map and a psychological family tree; “A...tool that is useful in assessing the impact family has on our lives. The role of the family map provides a way of conceptualizing family patterns and relationships....” (*Milewski-Hertlein, 2001, p. 23*).

Intersectionality: this refers to the ways in which race, gender, class, sexual orientation, age, religion, and other locations of social group membership impact lived experiences and social relations (*Harris & Bartlow, 2015*). Also refer to Kimberle Crenshaw’s Ted Talk: [ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality](https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality).

Family of Origin: the family that folks grew up with, which may include close and distant blood relatives like biological parents, grandparents, siblings, cousins, etc. and/or other caregivers such as adoptive parents and foster parents.

Enmeshed: a relationship between two or more people in which one’s personal boundaries are unclear or poorly defined.

Triangulation: when two members of a triad form a dynamic that causes direct or indirect injury to the third. In the case of a genogram, two family members may form an alliance against the third, or one may use/manipulate a second (e.g., a parent using a child) to exert power or cause harm to the third.

TIME

STEPS 1-9	Introductions and Opening Activity	30 min.
STEPS 10-13	Introducing Genograms	50 min.
STEPS 14-16	Cultural Reflections Chat	30 min.
STEPS 17-19	Closing Activity	10 min.

FACILITATION PREP

The facilitator(s) should complete the following tasks before the lesson starts:

- ❑ Place one of only two types of small stickers in the corner of each nametag to serve as a dividing technique for two large groups. Set out name tags for participants.
- ❑ This lesson includes a slide presentation, “Constructing a Multi-Generational Cultural Genogram”, which can be found on the SWAG Toolkit website. Review the full presentation at least one day prior to the session to become familiar with its contents.
- ❑ Check your space 60 minutes in advance of the session to ensure that a computer, projector, screen, sound, and Internet access are available and in working order, and that the presentation can be seen and navigated properly. If you do not have access to technology, print out the presentation as a handout for each participant.
- ❑ This lesson also features a YouTube video, “What Is A Genogram?”, which can be found at [youtube.com/watch?time_continue=19&v=MuxvG9tbUMs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=19&v=MuxvG9tbUMs). Test the embedded link to the video in the slide presentation before the session. If it does not play properly and you have internet access, cue the video on YouTube, and then minimize the viewing window. If you do not have Internet access, skip the video.
- ❑ Prepare three separate sheets of flip chart paper with one of the following headings:
 - What do we need from the group to have a safe and positive learning environment?,
 - What do we need from the instructor to have a safe and positive learning environment?, and
 - What do I need from the participants to create a safe and positive learning environment?

Keep each sheet hidden until Step 3.

REQUIRED BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE FOR EDUCATORS

The qualifications for educators teaching this lesson should include:

- Licensable mental health degree
- Five years of significant clinical experience
- Five years of significant teaching experience with adults
- Specific knowledge of:
 - » Family therapy dynamics
 - » Black culture
 - » Queer culture
 - » Intersectionality
 - » Affect management skills in group setting
- Firm grasp of how to distinguish and define:
 - » Biological sex
 - » Gender identity
 - » Gender expression
 - » Sexual orientation

MATERIALS

The facilitator(s) should have the following materials for the lesson:

- Name tags with stickers
- Flip chart paper
- Sheets of legal-sized paper (2-3 per participant)
- Markers
- Colored pencils (7-10 per participant)
- “Constructing a Multi-Generational Cultural Genogram” slide presentation
- Computer
- LCD projector, screen, and connector cables
- Speakers

HANDOUTS

Each participant should be provided with the following printed materials:

- H1, “The Multicultural Family Institute’s Standard Symbols for Genograms”
- H2, “Cultural Reflection Questions”
- End-of-Session Evaluation

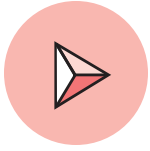
RESOURCES FOR FAMILY THERAPY DYNAMICS, INTERSECTIONALITY, BLACK & QUEER CULTURE

Books:

- McGoldrick, M. & Hardy, K. (2008). Re-visioning family therapy: Race, culture, and gender in clinical practice (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Minuchin, P., Colapinto, J., & Minuchin, S. (2007). Working with families of the poor (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Nichols, M. P., & Davis, S. D. (2017). Family therapy: Concepts and methods (11th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Sue, D. W. (2010). Microaggressions in everyday life: Race, gender and sexual orientation. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons.
- Carter, B., & McGoldrick, M. (1999). The expanded family life cycle. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. Chapter 1: Family Life Cycle.

Videos and Websites:

- Black Genealogy: Self Liberator & Therapeutic Tool, at [youtube.com/watch?v=sGapMcmmJew](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sGapMcmmJew)
- Multicultural Family Institute, at multiculturalfamily.org
- The Urgency of Intersectionality, at [ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality](https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality)
- Ted Talk video playlists on LGBT, at [ted.com/topics/lgbt](https://www.ted.com/topics/lgbt)
- Sexual & Gender Diversity Genograms: A Tool to Transcend Hetero-, Cis-, and Mono-Normativity in Practice, at [slideshare.net/SpectraWorkshops/queer-genograms-workshop-poly-conf](https://www.slideshare.net/SpectraWorkshops/queer-genograms-workshop-poly-conf)



PROCEDURE

The facilitator(s) should follow the steps in this section to facilitate the session, and use the margin for notes and prompts.



Introductions and Opening Activity

STEP 1

Welcome participants to your session, and **thank** them for coming. **Conduct** brief introductions (name, pronouns) with the group as needed. **Review** all established group agreements and **reaffirm** consent from the group. If group agreements have not been completed, please create them at this time (*use the Community Agreements lesson, if necessary.*)

STEP 2

Introduce the session topic by informing to the group that it will be discussing families, including the families of origin they grew up with. **Warn** participants that the discussion will be personal and potentially sensitive. **Encourage** participants to, as they need, care for themselves, and take breaks as they may deem it appropriate.

STEP 3

Explain to the group that because all families are different, and each person's experience of their Family of Origin is different, they will be spending some time discussing some "Family Guidelines." (*If your group is used to creating ground rules or community agreements, or has standing agreements from previous sessions, explain that this activity will serve as a more in-depth experience of that activity.*)

STEP 4

Separate the large group into two smaller groups; **instruct** them to group up according to the sticker on their nametags. **Reveal** the flip chart sheets created prior to the session (*see Facilitation Prep*), and then **give** one to each of the small groups. **Instruct** each small group to select a recorder to write on the sheet, and a reporter to share with the larger group what was developed. **Give** each small group five minutes to complete their lists. While the group is working, **prepare** your own answers to the flip chart paper entitled "What do I need from the participants to create a safe and positive learning environment?"

STEP 5 After five minutes, gather the groups back together and instruct the first group present their bullet point list. Once presented, ask the second group if they have additions or clarifications on the first group's list. Modify accordingly. Allow five minutes for this activity.

STEP 6 Repeat the process from Step 5 with the second group. Allow five minutes for this activity.

STEP 7 Present the list you created as facilitator. Ask the group if they have additions or clarifications they would like to make, and then modify accordingly. Allow five minutes for this activity.

STEP 8 Once all sheets have been presented, proceed through the following Discussion Questions:

1. "What was it like doing this activity?"
2. "Were there any surprises? If so, what?"
3. "How is doing something like this *similar* to the spoken rules of living in a family?"
4. "How is doing something like this *different* to the spoken rules of living in a family?"
5. "Have you ever done something like this with your family? If so, how do you think it affected you? If not, how do you think it might have made a difference in your lived experience of your family?"

STEP 9 Close the activity by summarizing the importance that roles and expectations play in Families of Origin, especially related to navigating forms of oppression, hardships, adulthood social support, and healthy decision-making. Explain that, in some cases, the families that some people grow up with can be full of unspoken expectations, secrets, loyalty conflicts, and generations of family legacy that influence how people experience the world as adults in the here and now. Explain that this can also impact either the positive or limited experience of social support that folks have, especially when navigating such factors as racism, homophobia, and other hardships. Finally, explain to participants that they will now spend some time reflecting on their own families using a tool called a Genogram.



Introducing Genograms

STEP 10



Invite participants to raise their hand if they've heard of a genogram before. Invite those who have to briefly share their experiences. Distribute a copy of Handout H1, "The Multicultural Family Institute's Standard Symbols for Genograms" to each participant. Inform them that this handout provides symbols and descriptions of diverse LGBT family representations used in a genogram, and can be referenced throughout the following presentation and activity.

STEP 11



Open the slide presentation included with this lesson, Slides S1, "Constructing a Multi-Generational Cultural Genogram". Proceed through the slides as follows:

SLIDE 1 Title Slide

Read the title of the slide presentation (*optional*).

SLIDE 2 Families are Diverse

Remind the group that there is no one type of Family of Origin. Some people may have grown up with two parents and a few siblings, some may have been raised by their grandparents, and others may have grown up in foster care or an adopted family.

SLIDE 3 What is a Genogram?

Describe the basic concept of a genogram as a psychological family tree that maps a family over generations. Explain that it can be used to help people identify intergenerational family patterns.

SLIDE 4 What Does a Genogram Look Like?

Explain that this slide is an example of a four-generation genogram. Explain that it highlights numerous relationships, but focuses on a person named "Daniel" and his relationships with his parents. Explain that the "X" through the circle representing Daniel's mother, Helene, represents her death, having passed away in 1981. Point out the three lines hashed through the line between Daniel and his mother. Explain that those lines represent an "enmeshed" relationship, meaning that the personal and emotional boundaries between them were often blurred in ways that might not have been ideal or healthy. Explain that genograms can be as simple or complex as needed to reflect a family's true dynamics.

SLIDE 5 Related Concepts

Highlight that intergenerational family patterns are often referred to by mental health professionals as “multigenerational transmission.” Explain that the term explains that how we respond to the world emotionally is often influenced by multiple generations of Families of Origin. Invite 2–3 participants to share brief examples of how this dynamic shows up in their own lives, or in the lives of others they may know.

SLIDES 6-13 Basic Notations

Explain that you will not review various types of genogram notations so that participants are aware of how they might use them when making their own genograms later on in during the session. Review each slide, reading each definition and providing examples and clarification as needed.

SLIDES 14-15 Basic Notations

Review each slide for participants, while noting that going back as many generations as possible is often useful to identify intergenerational patterns.

SLIDE 16 May the Force Be with You

Explain that you will now be showing a three-minute clip from a popular movie that highlights how genograms show up in families. If you have not yet, cue up the YouTube clip by clicking the link on the slide, and then play it in its entirety.

SLIDES 17-18 Family Patterns

Remind participants that the genogram can begin to reveal family patterns related to strengths, resiliency, worldviews, cultural scripts, and dysfunctions.

SLIDE 19 Dysfunction and Strengths in Families

Explain to participants that identification of both dysfunctional patterns (e.g., substance abuse, violence) and generational strengths (e.g., resilience, creativity) is important to grasp how the present is influenced by the past.

SLIDE 20 Triangles

Ask participants for a show of hands if they’ve heard of the term “triangulation”; solicit 1-2 responses from hands raised. Read the definition of Triangulation

noted the Key Terms section of this lesson. Ask participants for a show of hands for anyone who has experienced this dynamic before. Solicit 1–2 examples from anyone willing to share.

SLIDE 21 To Get You Thinking

Explain to participants that they will now do some small group work. Instruct them to find a partner, and then discuss each of the questions written on the slide. Give the group 5–7 minutes. While the participants are discussing the questions, distribute either one half-sheet of flip chart paper, or 2–3 sheets of legal sized paper to each participant, along with several markers and two writing utensils per pair.)

SLIDES 22-24 The Queer Model Notations

Explain to participants that because traditional genograms have tended to focus solely on limited types of relationships and genders, there are other models that have been developed to better help people make notations that represent differences from the norm. Read and explain the genogram notations noted on the slide, and then ask participants if they have any questions.

SLIDE 25 Time to Draw Your Genogram

Solicit any final questions participants have about genograms before moving into genogram creation. Instruct participants to establish a private space for themselves in the room and begin drawing their Family of Origin Genogram, using the paper and writing utensils they have been given. Encourage participants to be honest, and to use as much of their own knowledge of their family as they can in creating their vision. Explain that once complete, participants will go back to their original partners and discuss at least part of what they have created.

SLIDE 27 Some Basic Notations

Allow this slide to stay visible to participants while they work.

STEP 13

Allow participants 20 minutes to complete their genograms. Circulate to answer questions and offer feedback as needed.



Cultural Reflections Chat

STEP 14



After 20 minutes has elapsed, instruct participants to return to the last partner they spoke to. Distribute a copy of **Handout H2, “Cultural Reflection Questions”** to each participant. Instruct participants to reflect on five of the handout questions of their choice with each other. (*Partners do not have to discuss the same questions.*) Before they begin to chat, instruct them to also share with their partner two challenging dynamics they identified in the creation of their genogram, and two affirming dynamics. Allow each partner 5–7 minutes to share.

STEP 15

After each partner has had the chance to discuss their genogram, reconvene the large group, and then proceed through the following Discussion Questions:

1. “What was it like doing this activity?”
2. “Can you identify any family patterns in your genogram that surprised you?”
3. “Can you identify any culturally-specific family patterns that may have impacted someone growing up as a gay or bisexual in your family?”
4. “What areas of your family patterns reveal challenges?”
5. “What areas of your family patterns reveal strengths? How do you think family messages about sexuality may have impacted your sexual decision-making?”
6. “Are there any gaps left in your genogram that you would like to fill? If so, what steps might you take to fill them?”

STEP 16

Conclude this part of the lesson by thanking everyone for their participation. Solicit any final questions or comments people have before moving on.



Closing Activity

STEP 17

Ask if anyone has any outstanding questions about the lesson. Respond to these as necessary. Distribute a copy of the End-of-Session Evaluation to each participant. Allow participants 5–7 minutes to complete the evaluation, and collect them as they are completed. After five minutes, invite any participants who have not completed the evaluation to do so after the next activity.

STEP 18

Conclude by asking each participant to reflect upon their experience in this lesson. Instruct each participant to answer the following question:

- “What is one message or affirming pattern from your family that you cherish that gives you strength when dealing with hardships in this world?”

Encourage all participants to answer, even if they find themselves challenged to view their families of origin in a positive light.

STEP 19

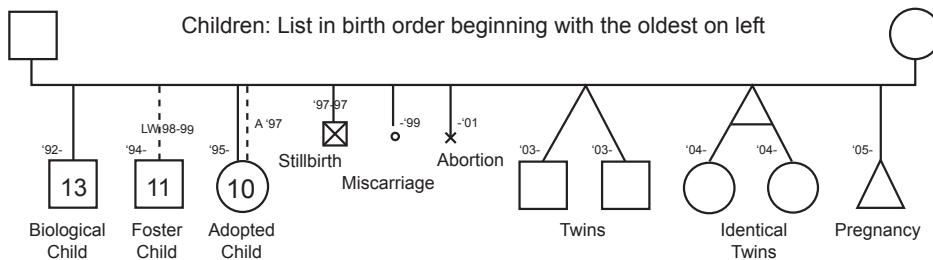
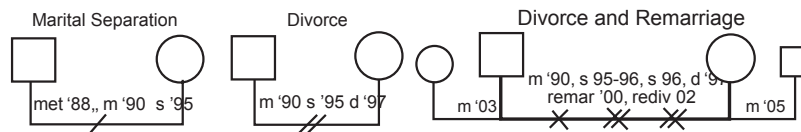
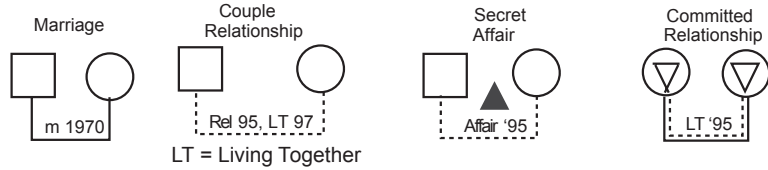
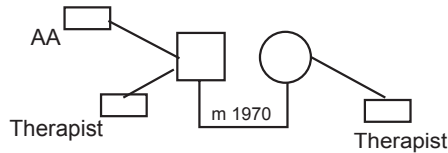
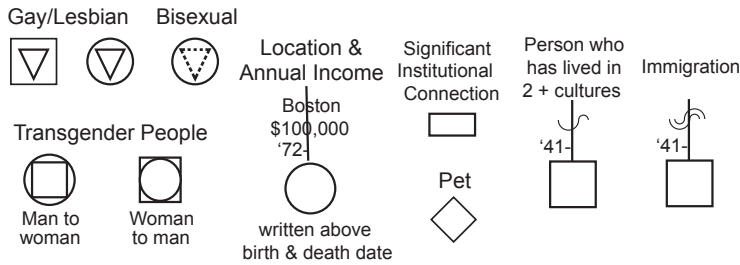
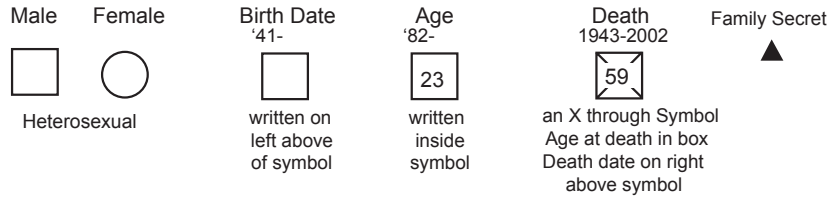
Once everyone has shared, thank the participants again for participating and then adjourn the session.



HANDOUT

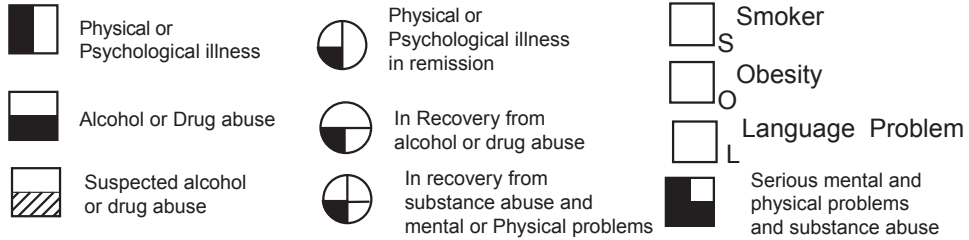
HANDOUT

THE MULTICULTURAL FAMILY INSTITUTE'S STANDARD SYMBOLS FOR GENOGRAMS

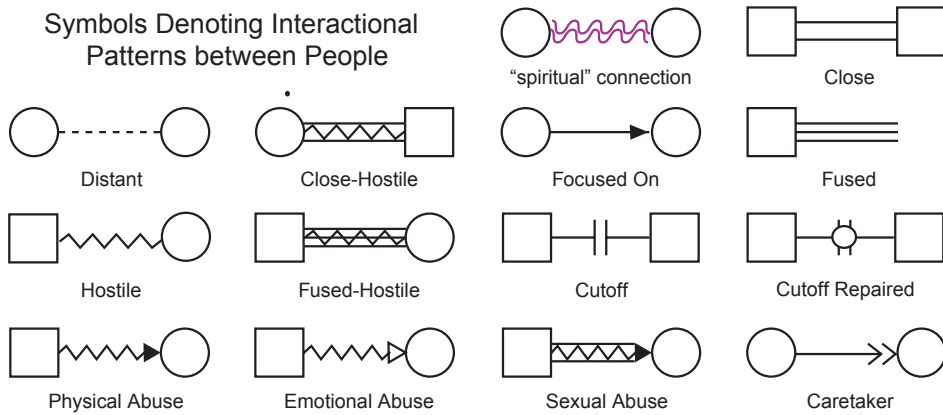


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Symbols Denoting Addiction, and Physical or Mental Illness



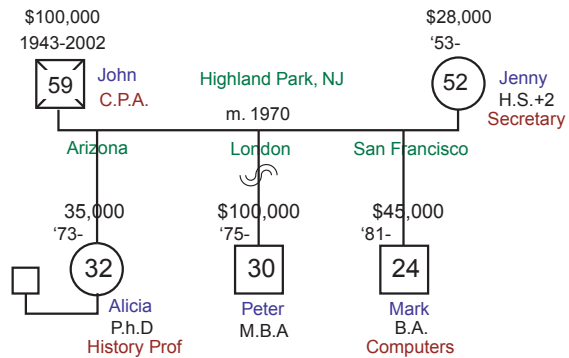
Symbols Denoting Interactional Patterns between People



Annual income is written just above the birth & death date.

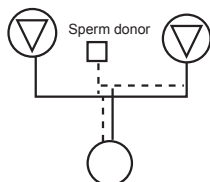
Typically you would include the person's occupation and education near the name and the person's whereabouts at the top of the line connecting to the symbol.

Symbol for Immigration =

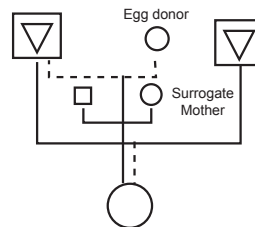


Artificial Insemination

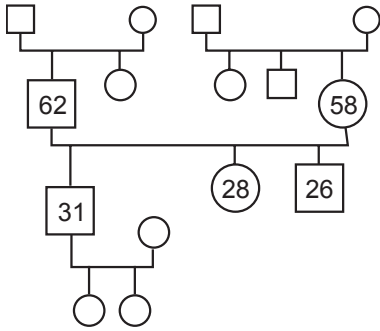
Lesbian couple whose daughter was conceived with egg of one partner and sperm donor.



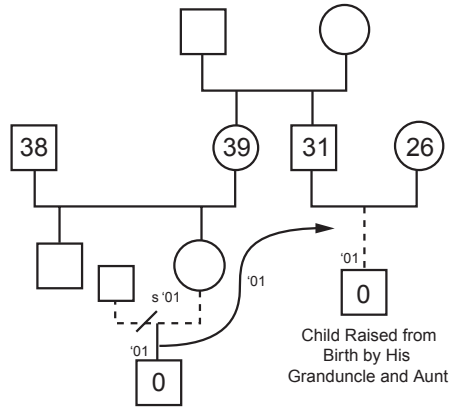
Gay Couple whose daughter was conceived with sperm of John and an egg donor, and carried by surrogate mother till birth.



Siblings of Primary Genogram Members are written smaller and higher. Spouses are written smaller and lower:



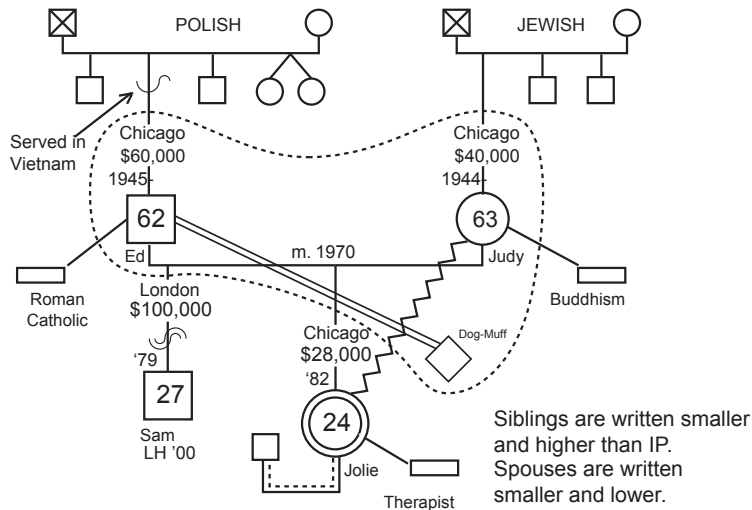
Foster Children



Use an arrow to show family into which child moved

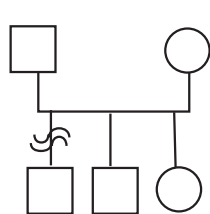
Household

Household shown by encircling members living together (Couple living with their dog after launching Children)

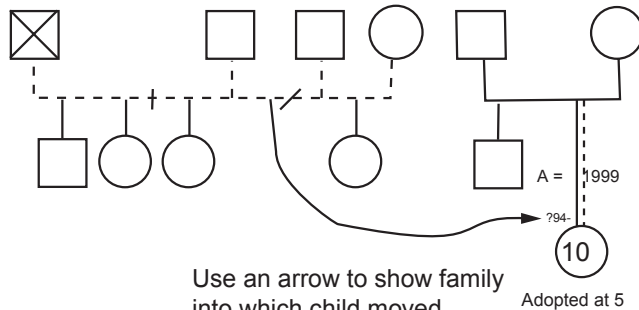


Siblings are written smaller and higher than IP. Spouses are written smaller and lower.

Symbol for Immigration

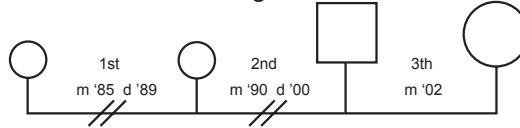


Adopted Child

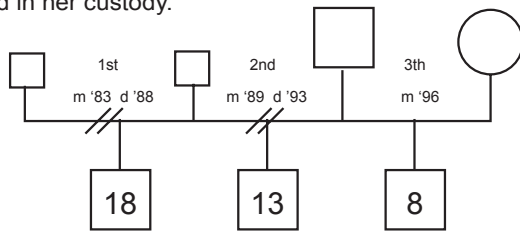


Use an arrow to show family into which child moved

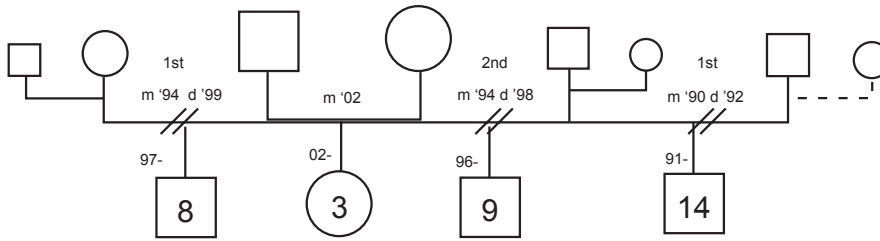
- 1 Husband, His Current Wife and his Ex-Wives (who are shown lower and smaller). Husband's wives may go on left to be closest to him. Indicators "1st," "2nd" etc. make clear the order of his marriages.



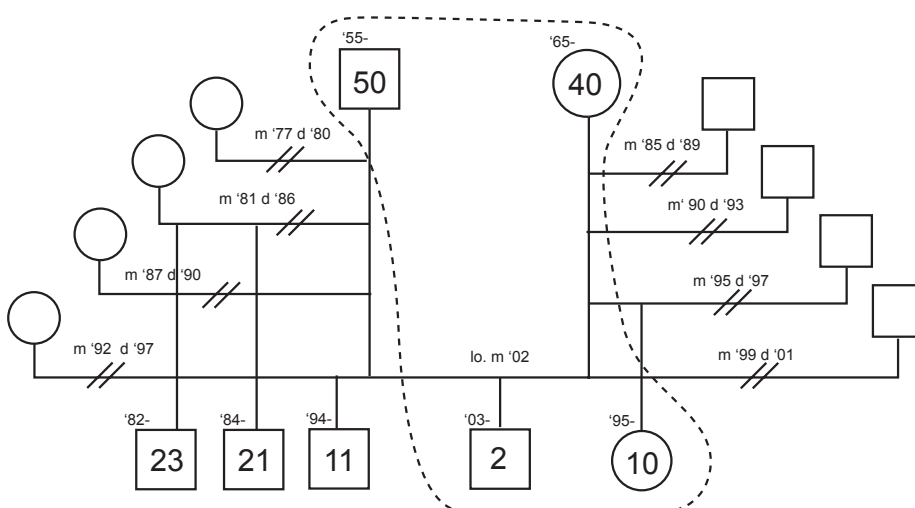
- 2 Wife, Her Current Husband and her Ex-Husbands (who are shown lower and smaller). Wife's previous relationships are shown on left to keep children in birth order, since they remained in her custody.



- 3 Couple with 3 year old, showing their previous spouses (smaller) and those spouses' new partners (even smaller)



- 4 Couple living with their joint child and her child from a previous relationship. The other spouses of the partners are shown smaller and lower on either side of the present household, indicated by a dotted line.





HANDOUT

CULTURAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Directions:

Please discuss a minimum of five of these questions about your genogram with your partner.
(If there are more than five you'd like to answer, consider taking this handout home!)

- What are some of the messages you've received about gender from your family?
- What are some of the messages that you've received about sexual orientation from your family?
- What are some of the messages you've received about race from your family?
- What are some of the messages you've received about religion from your family?
- Were there any messages that you received growing up that spoke to any intersecting identities you hold (e.g., Black & same-gender-loving, Black and trans or gender non-conforming, Black and male, etc.)? If so, what were they?
- What parts of those groups do they embrace or reject? How does this influence your feelings about your cultural identity and sexual orientation?
- What aspects of your personal culture do you have the most comfort "owning", and/or the most difficulty "owning"?
- How was conformity to your family's norms or ideals about any of these topics rewarded?
- Was nonconformity ever punished? If so, how?