

## Reflection on Genogram

By Ciara Reilly

A genogram is typically used in psychology as a way to map out relationships within a family and learn how members interact with one another. Creating a genogram was a really interesting way to discover things I had never known about my family and to realize how and why conflicts have developed. I also saw that the conflicts stem from disagreements between traits of family members, because of the strong personalities that exist in my family. By making this genogram, I was made aware not only of conflicts, but also traits that my family members share, which helped me discover more about myself and explain why I behave the way I do.

To complete this project I informally interviewed my mother and grandmother for the majority of the questions I had. Even though the genogram I made only consists of family members that I know very well and speak to on a fairly regular basis, everyone I talked to seemed to want to tell me more about my family and accomplishments ancestors of mine have made. Originally I was going to include my dad's side of the family as well, but he emigrated from Ireland when he was in his twenties, and the majority of his family still lives overseas. I have met everyone in his family and some members I am close with, like my grandmother, but for the most part, I know my mother's side better because almost everyone lives in the United States and we get together regularly, so I decided to focus the genogram on the Kenny and Mullins side.

While making this genogram, it became more apparent that the main conflicts exist between the women in the family, mainly stemming from my grandmother and problems she has with other people. I believe that, especially on my mother's side, the women are very powerful and have a large say in everything the family does. My grandmother is an especially strong

woman and also very stubborn in always believing her ideas to be right, which is usually why conflicts ensue. After my grandfather died in 2004, conflicts developed between her and my grandfather's siblings about frivolous things, probably stemming from larger issues, namely the loss of my grandfather. These conflicts have created a lot of tension within the family, especially because my great aunts, Patricia and Chris care about my grandmother a lot and wish to have a relationship with her again. But my grandmother, being the headstrong woman that she is, has made up her mind not to be in contact with them and has no desire to make amends. Making the genogram caused me to think a little more about these issues and also to get frustrated a bit with both sides for letting these arguments upset one another so much. I know that because of the personalities and traits each person possesses, that ending these arguments is not a simple task.

Although the genogram does not necessarily show the traits that the family has, I think the conflictual lines tell a lot about how these people behave. The Big Five Personality Model is described by Douglas Bernstein (2011) as "A view based on studies using factor analysis that suggests the existence of five basic components of human personality: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism." (p.435). While creating this project I thought about how each family member displayed these traits and noticed that everyone is pretty similar when it comes to the openness and extraversion traits. When this model is applied to the members of my family, everyone ranks especially high in the traits openness and extraversion.

In my family if there is a disagreement, it will always be brought up and talked about in front of everyone. This side of my family has very few secrets and would rather argue their way through a conflict to be done with it than keep fighting for long periods of time. My grandmother is the only exception to this; she will deal with conflicts as they arise by working through them,

but continue to hold a grudge long after the conflict has arisen. I believe that my grandmother and I have very similar ways of dealing with problems, which is why we get along so well. The openness trait is marked by the curiosity, creativeness and original thought processes. I believe that everyone in my family, especially my immediate family, contains this openness trait. All of my siblings have the desire to make art, whether it is through music, drawing, photography or creative writing, and have always excelled in these areas.

I imagine nearly everyone in my family possesses a high ranking in the extraversion trait. There is not a family gathering that goes by without dramatic storytelling, acting, impersonations, and singing. These are loud gatherings as well, as everyone is always fighting for attention, wanting to provide the most entertainment. Talking has never been an issue in my family, either. No matter what the situation, starting a conversation comes very easily to both side of my family, always valuing what others have to say.

Aside from the traits that shape the way my family behaves, I think there is also an expectation that exists for everyone in my family to value and pursue higher education. My grandfather was a physics professor at Bradley University and his impact at the university and love of science has always been something everyone in my family has found inspiring. My parents have also taught us the value of education and have made a good education possible for me and my siblings. Albert Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, or "the learned expectation of success" states that we act based on our perceptions about success. (Bernstein, 2011, p. 440). This theory is definitely applicable to my family's views on education. My parents went to college because they learned that education is a way to become successful and have instilled these views in their children, shaping us to believe that earning an education is a way to be successful.

Although I did not incorporate these specific traits and beliefs in the actual genogram, making it helped me to realize that these beliefs have shaped and continue to shape my family's viewpoints on many things. By outlining the specific relationships that people in my family have, it helped me to realize traits that I have in common with my family. It made me sad to see the relationships that have fallen apart, but I know the stubbornness that everyone shares is the main reason behind it. Outlining the traits my family shares by making a genogram was an interesting way to learn more about them and myself.

## Works Cited

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