

DNA and Endogamy

By Dani Crossley

I am not a DNA expert, not even close. I'm a DNA dabbler. I've had a few successes, but they were probably low-hanging fruit. I attended a webinar today given by Diahan Southard of YourDNAGuide.com. She's the expert and if you're serious about using your DNA results to unlock mysterious ancestral relationships, you will want to explore the offerings on her website.

Perhaps you've already gotten started and come upon some unusual results when comparing shared matches to a known ancestor. It appears that many matches are related to both sides of your family. Or maybe what appears to be a heretofore unknown half sibling really isn't. A few definitions might be helpful.

Multiple relationships: The best example of this is when two sisters marry two brothers. Children of sisters are cousins. Children of sisters who marry brothers are what is known as double cousins. When trying to sort out the level of a relationship to a DNA match, a unit of measure known as centiMorgans (cMs) is used. There is a chart available (the Shared CM Project - <https://dnainter.com/tools/sharedcmv4>) that tells the range of cMs possible for different relationships. Normally, the average for a first cousin is around 860 cMs or so. When working with multiple relationships (which are applicable up to the 2nd cousin level), you would add the two cM amounts together: so double cousins would be 1700+ cMs. This amount *usually* indicates a half-sibling. Imagine the conversation as you're reviewing your DNA matches and you see one with this high amount of cMs. "Uh, Dad, what happened here?"

Pedigree Collapse: This is when one couple appears in your ancestral chart in more than one place. I have this occurring in my tree: John and Mary Travers Sterling, my 6th great-grandparents, were the parents of Travers Sterling (1740-1826) and Ephraim Sterling (1756-1845). Travers and Ephraim were both my 5th great-grandfathers, so their parents (John and Mary) appear twice in my ancestral fan chart. So, instead of 128 unique 6th great-grandparent couples, I have 127.

Endogamy: The custom of marrying only within the limits of a local community, clan, or tribe. Most people of Jewish descent would fit in this category. Another example I learned about today was the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa, founded by a member of the Dutch East India Company in 1652. I feel like Crisfield, MD (where my maternal grandfather's family and the pedigree collapse example used above is from) would also fit this definition. If you look back at the names in this line of my tree, you see the same ones over and over again: Lawson, Tawes, Sterling, Nelson, Ward, Riggin and more. Trying to use traditional DNA tools to sort out endogamous ancestors is an exercise in futility. There are special approaches to this conundrum which make it more possible. I again recommend a visit to YourDNAGuide.com's YouTube videos and blogs. It is beyond my capabilities in writing this short article.

I wish you all much luck and patience in exploring your DNA matches and researching your ancestry!