

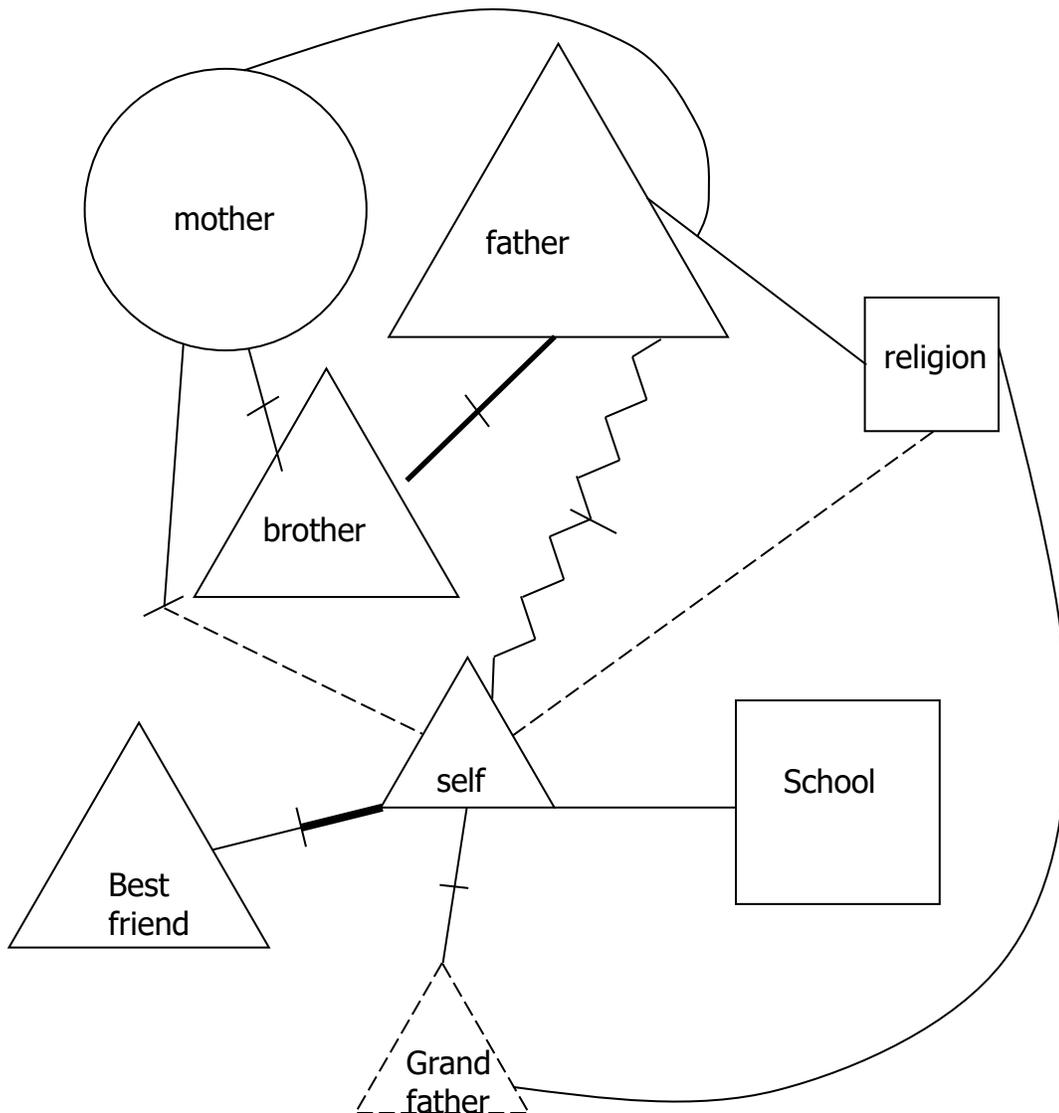
## **DIRECTIONS FOR MAKING A SOCIAL/CULTURAL ATOM**

Adapted from Antonina Garcia by Mario Cossa

Your social atom is composed of you and those people, organizations, and cultural norms and beliefs that are important to you in your life. To draw a picture of your social/cultural atom, start with a large, blank sheet of paper. It is best to use a pencil with an eraser.

- 1) Imagine that the piece of paper in front of you is your life space today. Using a triangle if you are a male or a circle if you are a female, locate yourself on the page.
- 2) Then, using triangles for males, circles for females, and squares for organizations and cultural norms and beliefs, arrange in relation to you those that are significant in your life.
- 3) If any of the people are deceased used a dotted line to make the triangle or circle.
- 4) If certain elements feel close to you, place them close. If they feel far away, place them far away.
- 5) If they feel big in your life, make them big. If they feel small in your life, make them small.
- 6) Put a name or initials in each figure so that you will remember who is who and what is what after you've completed the process.
- 7) Connect with a solid line to indicate a positive relationship.
- 8) Use a dotted line to indicate a weak or uncertain relationship.
- 9) Use a jagged line to indicate a relationship in which there is conflict.
- 10) If the feeling between yourself and the other element is not mutual, you can break the line in half and indicate the appropriate feeling from each end. For example: If I feel very strongly positive toward someone but they feel indifferent toward me, the line coming from my triangle or circle is solid and thick. In the center it meets a line coming from the other that is dotted and faint.
- 11) Use your own creativity to make the representation as accurate as possible (e.g. use colors, use other kinds of lines, use pictures.)

This is a sample of a portion of a social/cultural atom. What can you determine about this person and their relationships by studying this diagram?



## **SOME THINGS TO LOOK FOR AND THINK ABOUT WHEN WORKING WITH THE SOCIAL/CULTURAL ATOM**

Adapted from Antonina Garcia by Mario Cossa

The social/cultural atom is discussed openly with the client. The client and teacher/counselor/therapist/group leader (and sometime group members) explore what the placement of the figures means to the client.

Most people have between 5 and 25 *people* on their social atom. Fewer may indicate that the person is isolated. More may indicate that the person has difficulty with intimacy.

Erasures may indicate uncertainty about where the client wants those people or elements to be or where they actually are.

Animals: Some people's pets are very significant.

Dead people: Often placed in upper corners; if they are large and placed close to the person, there may be unresolved grief issues.

Size: Note if anyone is larger than the creator of the atom, is this person more important than the creator is in his own life? If several people are larger than the creator, this may mean that she feels more an auxiliary in the lives of others rather than the star of her own life. If almost everyone is significantly smaller than the creator, the person may be somewhat self-involved.

Placement of oneself: If the client places him/herself at the bottom of the page, the person may be depressed. If he places himself in one of the corners, he may feel marginalized or cornered. In either instance, one might ask the client what determined his choice of where to place himself.

Social/Cultural Atoms can be created at different times to indicate how a person's life and relationships change. They can also be created to explore a specific aspect of a person's life. For example a person can create a S/C Atom of: School Relationships, Extended Family; Work Relationships, etc.