




ggpedigree: Visualizing Pedigrees with ‘ggplot2’ and ‘plotly’

S. Mason Garrison^{*1}

¹ Department of Psychology, Wake Forest University, North Carolina, USA

DOI:

Software

- [Review](#) 
- [Repository](#) 
- [Archive](#) 

Submitted:

Published:

License

Authors of papers retain copyright and release the work under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License ([CC-BY](#)).

Summary

Pedigree diagrams underpin research and practice across genetics, animal breeding, genealogy, forensics, and counseling. They help medical geneticists trace the inheritance of Mendelian diseases and identify at-risk relatives; enable dairy breeders to plan matings that improve milk yield; support genealogists in reconstructing ancestry; assist forensic scientists in establishing familial connections in criminal investigations; and facilitate family therapists and counselors in understanding their clients’ relationships (McGoldrick, Gerson, & Petry, 2020). Early R tools such as `kinship2` (Sinnwell, Therneau, & Schaid, 2014) plot simple nuclear families effectively, but they do not scale to today’s pedigrees that can exceed 1,000s of individuals. As datasets have grown, researchers now work with increasingly complex family structures, including large-scale plant breeding pedigrees (Shaw, Graham, Kennedy, Milne, & Marshall, 2014), web-based pedigree management systems (Ranaweera, Makalic, Hopper, & Bickerstaffe, 2018), interactive pedigree editors (Carver et al., 2018), and behavior genetic studies of extended family structures (Garrison et al., 2023; M. Hunter, Garrison, Burt, & Rodgers, 2021). Such complexity exposes the limitations of existing tools, which often struggle to handle large datasets and complex relationships. `ggpedigree` addresses this need by combining a vectorised layout algorithm, `ggplot2` output, and optional `plotly` interactivity.

Statement of need

Pedigree visualization has traditionally relied on specialized proprietary software (e.g., Progeny, GenoPro, Pedigree Viewer) or R packages like `kinship2` (Sinnwell et al., 2014), `pedtools` (Magnus Dehli Vigeland, 2021a), `pedtricks` (J. Martin, Wolak, Johnston, & Morrissey, 2025). While these tools are functional for many use cases, their limitations become pronounced when working with complex, modern pedigree datasets or when more detailed customization is required. Most existing R packages focus on base graphics or simple `ggplot2` implementations.

First, base R graphics lack the modular design and extensibility needed for generating publication-quality pedigree figures. For example, `kinship2` (Sinnwell et al., 2014) uses base graphics and loop-based layout functions that do not scale well. `pedtricks` (J. Martin et al., 2025), by contrast, returns `ggplot2`-based plots and is designed for large, multigenerational animal pedigrees, but offers minimal support for annotation layering, per-individual theming, or integration with phenotypic and model-based data

Second, most existing R-based tools offer no interactivity. Static graphics are often sufficient for publication, but interactivity improves exploration and communication during

^{*}corresponding author

model development or data cleaning. A notable exception is `pedtools` (Magnus Dehli Vigeland, 2021b), which offers a sister shiny app, `QuickPed` (Magnus D. Vigeland, 2022). While the R ecosystem includes libraries like `plotly` that support interactive plotting, these features have yet to be integrated into pedigree functions.

Third, current solutions are often poorly integrated with tidyverse workflows and do not expose the full theming and layering capabilities familiar to users of `ggplot2` (Hadley Wickham, 2016). In animal-focused workflows, rapid rendering often takes precedence over aesthetic flexibility, which can hinder interpretability in human-focused research.

Recent advances in behavior genetics and genetic epidemiology (Garrison et al., 2023; Lyu, Hunter, Good, Carroll, & Garrison, 2025; McArdle & McDonald, 1984) have introduced new visualization demands, particularly for extended families and highly interconnected pedigrees. Modern pedigree datasets can include hundreds or thousands of individuals across multiple generations, with overlapping relationships, consanguinity, remarriages, and twin sets that strain existing layout algorithms. Additionally, researchers increasingly need to overlay phenotypic information, genetic relatedness values, and model outputs onto pedigree plots to support interpretation and communication of their findings.

Several R packages attempt to address these challenges with built-in pedigree plotting functions. `kinship2` (Sinnwell et al., 2014) remains widely used but produces static base graphics and relies on non-vectorized recursive layout functions that do not scale well to large families. A partial `ggplot2` implementation exists but is incomplete, non-vectorized, and not actively maintained. `pedtricks`, a revival of `pedantics` (Morrissey, 2018), provides a `ggplot2`-based implementation for large animal pedigrees but lacks extensibility and interactivity. The `geneHapR` (Zhang, Jia, & Diao, 2023) package focuses on haplotype visualization rather than general pedigree structure. The `pedgene` package (Daniel & Sinnwell, 2024) offers some plotting functions but is primarily designed for association testing rather than visualization. The `pedigreejs` package (Carver et al., 2018) provides an interactive pedigree editor but does not integrate with R or `ggplot2`, limiting its utility for R users.

None of these packages offers the combination of modern `ggplot2` integration, interactive capabilities, and extensibility that `ggpedigree` provides. `ggpedigree` addresses these limitations by providing a comprehensive visualization framework built on modern R graphics infrastructure. It leverages the extensive customization capabilities of `ggplot2` while adding specialized functionality for pedigree-specific visualization challenges.

Software Architecture

`ggpedigree` is built on a modular architecture that separates data processing, layout calculation, and visualization layers. The core workflow involves: (1) data standardization and family structure analysis using `BGmisc` functions, (2) coordinate calculation using algorithms adapted from `kinship2`, (3) relationship connection mapping, and (4) layer-based plot construction using `ggplot2` geometry functions. This design allows users to customize any aspect of the visualization while maintaining computational efficiency for large pedigrees. The package integrates tightly with the broader R ecosystem, particularly the tidyverse (H. Wickham et al., 2019) and `BGmisc` (Garrison, S. M., Hunter, M. D., Lyu, X., Trattner, J. D., & Burt, S. A., 2024). All functions return standard R objects (`ggplot` or `plotly`) that can be further customized using familiar syntax, ensuring accessibility for users already comfortable with modern R data science workflows.

Features

We briefly describe the main features of the `ggpedigree` package below. A more detailed description of the package's features and usage is available in the [package vignettes](#),

which include examples of how to create static and interactive pedigree plots, customize aesthetics, and visualize relatedness matrices. Additional example data include squirrel data from the Kluane Red Squirrel Project (McFarlane et al., 2014, 2015) and Targaryen family data from the Song of Ice and Fire universe (G. R. Martin, 1997; G. R. R. Martin, 2018; G. R. R. Martin, Jr, & Antonsson, 2014). These datasets demonstrate the package's capabilities for both empirical and fictional pedigrees.

Core Functions

- Data Standardization and Family Structure Analysis: `ggPedigree()` integrates with BGmisc functions like `ped2fam()` to organize individuals by family, `recodeSex()` to standardize sex coding, and `checkParentIDs()` to validate pedigree structures. The function handles complex scenarios including consanguineous relationships and individuals appearing in multiple pedigree positions.
- Coordinate Calculation: `calculateCoordinates()` computes optimal positioning for individuals using algorithms adapted from `kinship2::align.pedigree`, with enhancements for large multi-generational pedigrees and complex family structures. The function returns coordinate grids that optimize spacing and minimize visual overlap. These steps are vectorized as much as possible to ensure computational efficiency, especially for large pedigrees.
- Relationship Connection Mapping: `calculateConnections()` generates connection paths between family members, mapping parent-child, sibling, spousal, and twin relationships. The function determines midpoints for line intersections and handles overlapping connections with specialized curved segments. These calculations are optimized for large datasets by using vectorized operations rather than the loop-based approaches used in `kinship2`.
- Layer-based Plot Construction: `ggPedigree()` constructs plots using ggplot2 geometry functions, returning standard ggplot2 objects that integrate with existing R workflows. `ggPedigreeInteractive()` extends plots into interactive plotly widgets with hover tooltips and dynamic exploration capabilities. A comprehensive config system allows customization of over 100 aesthetic and layout parameters.
- Focal Individual Highlighting: Advanced functionality to highlight specific individuals and their relatives based on additive genetic, mitochondrial, or other relationship matrices.

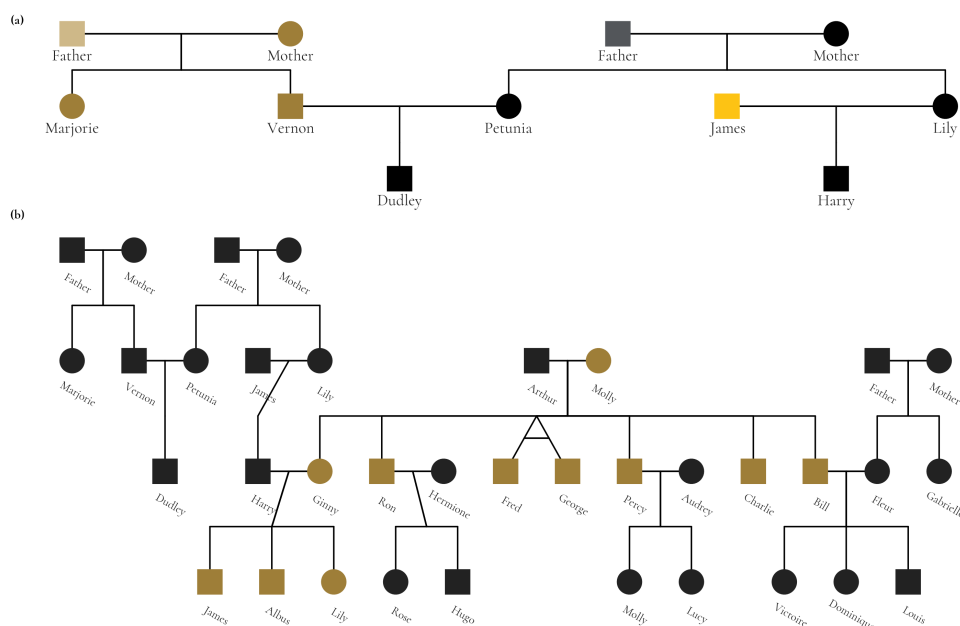
Specific Visualization Functions

- Pedigree Plotting: `ggPedigree()` creates static pedigree plots using ggplot2, supporting complex family structures, multiple generations, and customizable aesthetics. It can handle large pedigrees with thousands of individuals while maintaining clarity and readability.
- Interactive Pedigree Visualization: `ggPedigreeInteractive()` generates interactive pedigree plots using plotly, allowing users to explore large pedigrees dynamically. Users can configure tooltip content to display individual IDs, names, phenotypic information, and other relevant data. It supports tooltips, zooming, and panning for detailed exploration of family structures.
- Relatedness Matrix Heatmaps: `ggRelatednessMatrix()` creates customizable heatmap visualizations for genetic relatedness matrices with support for hierarchical clustering, interactive exploration, and seamless integration with BGmisc relatedness calculations.

- Phenotype-Relatedness Analysis: `ggPhenotypeByDegree()` produces specialized plots for visualizing phenotypic correlations as a function of genetic relatedness, including confidence intervals and statistical summaries for quantitative genetic analysis.

Illustrative Example of ggPedigree

Here, we illustrate some of the features by reproducing the figure from (M. D. Hunter et al., 2025) but restyled to conform to the Wake Forest Style Guidelines. As you can see, the `ggpedigree` package allows for complex family structures to be visualized in a clear and aesthetically pleasing manner.



We have combined two figures using `patchwork` (Pedersen, 2025) to show the pedigree of the Potter family from the Harry Potter series. The first plot (a) highlights the individual mtDNA lines in the Dursley and Evans families, while the second plot (b) shows the entire family structure with mitochondrial relationships highlighted in a gradient color scale. Features such as focal individual highlighting, custom color scales, text labels, fonts, are easily implemented. The package supports both static and interactive plots, allowing users to explore large pedigrees dynamically.

The plot includes individuals' names, relationships, and phenotypic information, all while maintaining clarity even with overlapping relationships. Although pleasing, this level of customization is not required, as default settings produce clear and informative pedigree plots.

Collectively, these tools provide a valuable resource for behavior geneticists and others who work with extended family data. They were developed as part of a grant and have been used in several ongoing projects, presentations (Garrison, 2024; M. D. Hunter, Garrison, Lyu, Good, & Burt, 2024), and forthcoming papers (Burt et al., 2025; M. D. Hunter et al., 2025; Lyu et al., 2025).

Availability

The `ggpedigree` package is open-source and available on both GitHub at <https://github.com/R-Computing-Lab/ggpedigree> and the Comprehensive R Archive Network (CRAN)

at <https://cran.r-project.org/package=ggpedigree>. It is licensed under the GNU General Public License.

Acknowledgments

The current research is indirectly supported by the National Institute on Aging (NIA), RF1-AG073189. The authors would like to thank Michael Hunter for their support and enthusiasm to the development of this package.

References

- Burt, S. A., Garrison, S. M., Lyu, X., Rodgers, J. L., Carroll, S. L., Smith, K. R., & Hunter, M. D. (2025). *Inherited mtDNA contributes to longevity: Evidence from extended pedigrees with 176 million kinship pairs. Revise and resubmit at eBioMedicine.*
- Carver, T., Cunningham, A. P., Babb de Villiers, C., Lee, A., Hartley, S., Tischkowitz, M., Walter, F. M., et al. (2018). Pedigreejs: A web-based graphical pedigree editor. *Bioinformatics*, 34(6), 1069–1071. doi:[10.1093/bioinformatics/btx705](https://doi.org/10.1093/bioinformatics/btx705)
- Daniel, S., & Sinnwell, J. (2024). Pedgene: Gene-level variant association tests for pedigree data. doi:[10.32614/CRAN.package.pedgene](https://doi.org/10.32614/CRAN.package.pedgene)
- Garrison, S. M. (2024). Charting new paths in behavior genetics: Developing a comprehensive r visualization atlas. *Behavior Genetics* (Vol. 54, p. 488488). SPRINGER. Retrieved from <https://scholar.google.com/scholar?cluster=4710819130852314260&hl=en&oi=scholar>
- Garrison, S. M., Hunter, M. D., Lyu, X., Trattner, J. D., & Burt, S. A. (2024). BGmisc: An r package for extended behavior genetics analysis. *Journal of Open Source Software*, 9(94). doi:[10.21105/joss.06203](https://doi.org/10.21105/joss.06203)
- Garrison, S. M., Lyu, X., Hunter, M. D., Rodgers, J. L., Smith, K. R., Coon, H., & Burt, S. A. (2023). Analyzing extended cousin similarity to unravel the mystery of mtDNA and longevity. *Behavior Genetics*. doi:[10.1007/s10519-023-10156-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10519-023-10156-9)
- Hunter, M. D., Garrison, S. M., Lyu, X., Good, R., & Burt, S. A. (2024). Tools for biometric modeling in large population databases. *Behavior Genetics* (Vol. 54, p. 531531). SPRINGER. Retrieved from <https://scholar.google.com/scholar?cluster=16878992125450714238&hl=en&oi=scholar>
- Hunter, M. D., Garrison, S. M., Lyu, X., Good, R., Carroll, S. L., & Burt, S. A. (2025). *Tracing the right path: Determination of large pedigree segmentation and relatedness. Revise and Resubmit at Behavior Genetics.*
- Hunter, M., Garrison, S. M., Burt, S. A., & Rodgers, J. L. (2021). The Analytic Identification of Variance Component Models Common to Behavior Genetics. *Behavior Genetics*, 51(4), 425–437. doi:[10.1007/s10519-021-10055-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10519-021-10055-x)
- Lyu, S. A., X. and Burt, Hunter, M. D., Good, R., Carroll, S. L., & Garrison, S. M. (2025). Detecting mtDNA effects with an extended pedigree model: An analysis of statistical power and estimation bias. *Behavior Genetics*. doi:[10.1101/2024.12.19.629449](https://doi.org/10.1101/2024.12.19.629449)
- Martin, G. R. (1997). *A game of thrones* (Vol. 1). Bantam.
- Martin, G. R. R. (2018). *Fire & blood: 300 years before a game of thrones*. New York: Random House Worlds.
- Martin, G. R. R., Jr, E. M. G., & Antonsson, L. (2014). *The world of ice & fire: The untold history of westeros and the game of thrones*. New York: Random House Worlds.
- Martin, J., Wolak, M., Johnston, S., & Morrissey, M. (2025). *Pedtricks: Visualize, summarize and simulate data from pedigrees*. doi:[10.32614/CRAN.package.pedtricks](https://doi.org/10.32614/CRAN.package.pedtricks)
- McArdle, J. J., & McDonald, R. P. (1984). Some algebraic properties of the reticular action model for moment structures. *British Journal of Mathematical and Statistical Psychology*, 37, 234–251. doi:[10.1111/j.2044-8317.1984.tb00802.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8317.1984.tb00802.x)

- McFarlane, S. E., Boutin, S., Humphries, M. M., McAdam, A. G., Gorrell, J. C., & Coltman, D. W. (2015, January 21). Data from: Very low levels of direct additive genetic variance in fitness and fitness components in a red squirrel population. Dryad. doi:[10.5061/DRYAD.N5Q05](https://doi.org/10.5061/DRYAD.N5Q05)
- McFarlane, S. E., Gorrell, J. C., Coltman, D. W., Humphries, M. M., Boutin, S., & McAdam, A. G. (2014). Very low levels of direct additive genetic variance in fitness and fitness components in a red squirrel population. *Ecology and Evolution*, 4(10), 1729–1738. doi:[10.1002/ece3.982](https://doi.org/10.1002/ece3.982)
- McGoldrick, M., Gerson, R., & Petry, S. (2020). *Genograms: Assessment and Treatment*. Erscheinungsort nicht ermittelbar: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Morrissey, M. (2018). *Pedantics: Functions to facilitate power and sensitivity analyses for genetic studies of natural populations*. CRAN. Retrieved from <https://CRAN.R-project.org/package=pedantics>
- Pedersen, T. L. (2025). *Patchwork: The composer of plots*. doi:[10.32614/CRAN.package.patchwork](https://doi.org/10.32614/CRAN.package.patchwork)
- Ranaweera, T., Makalic, E., Hopper, J. L., & Bickerstaffe, A. (2018). An open-source, integrated pedigree data management and visualization tool for genetic epidemiology. *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 47(4), 1034–1039. doi:[10.1093/ije/dyy049](https://doi.org/10.1093/ije/dyy049)
- Shaw, P. D., Graham, M., Kennedy, J., Milne, I., & Marshall, D. F. (2014). Helium: Visualization of large scale plant pedigrees. *BMC Bioinformatics*, 15(1), 259. doi:[10.1186/1471-2105-15-259](https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2105-15-259)
- Sinnwell, J. P., Therneau, T. M., & Schaid, D. J. (2014). The kinship2 r package for pedigree data. *Human Heredity*, 78, 91–93. doi:[10.1159/000363105](https://doi.org/10.1159/000363105)
- Vigeland, Magnus Dehli. (2021b). *Pedigree analysis in r*. London: Academic Press, an imprint of Elsevier. Retrieved from <https://shop.elsevier.com/books/pedigree-analysis-in-r/vigeland/978-0-12-824430-2>
- Vigeland, Magnus Dehli. (2021a). Pedigree analysis in {r}.
- Vigeland, Magnus D. (2022). QuickPed: An online tool for drawing pedigrees and analysing relatedness. *BMC Bioinformatics*, 23(1), 220. doi:[10.1186/s12859-022-04759-y](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12859-022-04759-y)
- Wickham, Hadley. (2016). *ggplot2. Use R! Cham: Springer International Publishing*. doi:[10.1007/978-3-319-24277-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-24277-4)
- Wickham, H., Averick, M., Bryan, J., Chang, W., McGowan, L., François, R., Grolemund, G., et al. (2019). Welcome to the tidyverse. *Journal of Open Source Software*, 4(43), 1686. doi:[10.21105/joss.01686](https://doi.org/10.21105/joss.01686)
- Zhang, R., Jia, G., & Diao, X. (2023). geneHapR: An r package for gene haplotypic statistics and visualization. *BMC Bioinformatics*, 24(1), 199. doi:[10.1186/s12859-023-05318-9](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12859-023-05318-9)

Appendix

Source code for the figures above is available in the `vignettes/articles/_paper.Rmd` file. The code below reproduces the figure using the `ggpedigree` package.

```
library(ggpedigree) # ggPedigree lives here
library(BGmisc) # helper utilities & example data
library(tidyverse) # for data manipulation and plotting
library(showtext)
library(sysfonts)
library(patchwork) # for combining plots

# Load the potter pedigree data
data("potter")
# Removing Last names
```



```
df_potter <- potter %>%
  mutate(
    name = case_when(
      personID == 1 ~ "Vernon",
      personID == 2 ~ "Marjorie",
      personID == 3 ~ "Petunia",
      personID == 4 ~ "Lily",
      personID == 5 ~ "James",
      personID == 6 ~ "Dudley",
      personID == 7 ~ "Harry",
      personID == 8 ~ "Ginny",
      personID == 9 ~ "Arthur",
      personID == 10 ~ "Molly",
      personID == 11 ~ "Ron",
      personID == 12 ~ "Fred",
      personID == 13 ~ "George",
      personID == 14 ~ "Percy",
      personID == 15 ~ "Charlie",
      personID == 16 ~ "Bill",
      personID == 17 ~ "Hermione",
      personID == 18 ~ "Fleur",
      personID == 19 ~ "Gabrielle",
      personID == 20 ~ "Audrey",
      personID == 21 ~ "James",
      personID == 22 ~ "Albus",
      personID == 23 ~ "Lily",
      personID == 24 ~ "Rose",
      personID == 25 ~ "Hugo",
      personID == 26 ~ "Victoire",
      personID == 27 ~ "Dominique",
      personID == 28 ~ "Louis",
      personID == 29 ~ "Molly",
      personID == 30 ~ "Lucy",
      personID == 101 ~ "Mother",
      personID == 102 ~ "Father",
      personID == 103 ~ "Mother",
      personID == 104 ~ "Father",
      personID == 105 ~ "Mother",
      personID == 106 ~ "Father"
    )
  )
# Load Google fonts for styling
font_add_google(name = "Cormorant", family = "cormorant")
showtext_auto() # Load the showtext package to render Google fonts

# Set the WFU style guidelines for the plot
text_color_wfu <- "#222222" # dark grey for text labels
focal_fill_color_values_wfu <- c(
  "#9E7E38", "#000000", "#FDC314", "#CEB888", "#53565A")
family_wfu <- "cormorant"
text_size_wfu <- 14

# Create Panel A
m1 <- ggPedigree(df_potter %>% filter(personID %in% c(1:7, 101:104)),
```

```
famID = "famID",
personID = "personID",
config = list(
  label_include = TRUE,
  label_column = "name",
  point_size = 8,
  # outline_include = TRUE,
  focal_fill_personID = 8,
  outline_multiplier = 1.5,
  segment_linewidth = 0.5,
  label_text_size = 12,
  label_text_color = text_color_wfu,
  axis_text_color = text_color_wfu,
  label_text_family = family_wfu,
  focal_fill_include = TRUE,
  label_nudge_y = -0.30,
  focal_fill_method = "manual",
  focal_fill_color_values = focal_fill_color_values_wfu,
  focal_fill_force_zero = TRUE,
  label_method = "geom_text",
  focal_fill_na_value = text_color_wfu,
  focal_fill_scale_midpoint = 0.40,
  focal_fill_component = "matID",
  focal_fill_labels = NULL,
  sex_legend_show = FALSE,
  sex_color_include = FALSE
)
) + guides(shape = "none") + theme(
  plot.title = element_blank(),
  plot.title.position = "plot",
  text = element_text(family = family_wfu,
    size = 14)
) + coord_cartesian(ylim = c(3.25, 1),
  clip = "off")

# Create Panel B
m2 <- ggPedigree(df_potter,
  famID = "famID",
  personID = "personID",
  config = list(
    label_include = TRUE,
    label_column = "name",
    point_size = 8,
    focal_fill_personID = 8, # Molly Weasley
    outline_multiplier = 1.5,
    segment_linewidth = 0.5,
    label_text_size = 9,
    label_text_family = family_wfu,
    label_text_color = text_color_wfu,
    axis_text_color = text_color_wfu,
    label_nudge_y = -0.3,
    label_nudge_x = .1,
    focal_fill_include = TRUE,
    focal_fill_method = "gradient2",
    focal_fill_high_color = "#9E7E38",
```



```
focal_fill_mid_color = "#9E7E38",
focal_fill_low_color = text_color_wfu[2],
focal_fill_scale_midpoint = 0.85,
focal_fill_component = "mitochondrial",
focal_fill_force_zero = TRUE,
label_method = "geom_text",
focal_fill_na_value = text_color_wfu,
label_text_angle = -30,
sex_legend_show = FALSE,
sex_color_include = FALSE
)
) + theme(
  legend.position = "none",
  plot.title = element_blank(),
  plot.title.position = "plot",
  text = element_text(family = family_wfu,
    size = text_size_wfu, face = "bold")
) + coord_cartesian(ylim = c(4.25, .9), clip = "off")

# Combine the two plots using patchwork
showtext_auto()
result <- m1 + m2 +
  plot_layout(
    ncol = 1, heights = c(1.1, 2.5),
    guides = "collect", tag_level = "new"
  ) +
  plot_annotation(
    tag_levels = list(c("(a)", "(b)")),
    theme = theme(plot.margin = margin(0, 0, 0, 0), )
  ) +
  guides(shape = "none") &
  theme(
    legend.position = "none",
    plot.margin = unit(c(0, 0, 0.0, 0), "lines"),
    plot.tag = element_text(family = family_wfu,
      size = 2*text_size_wfu, face = "bold")
  )

# save as a png
ggsave(
  filename = "wfu_potter_pedigree.png",
  plot = result,
  width = 9.5, height = 6, dpi = 300, units = "in"
)
```