

FAMILY WEBS:
THE IMPACT OF WOMEN'S GENEALOGY
RESEARCH ON FAMILY COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

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Family genealogy research has grown exponentially over the past decade, making it an area worthy of scholarly inquest. This study explores the connection between women and genealogy by examining the ways inherited familial narratives/data work to position women within American culture. Although studies of women's lives are on the rise, the standpoint(s) of women has historically been marginalized, particularly as women continue to be relegated to domestic and family care. Through researching women's standpoints we are better able to see the political constructions of sexist oppression, as well as the ways genealogy offers a possible site for resistance. Interviewing women who are engaged in the act of researching their own family genealogy provides insight into their motivation for doing so.

In documenting the family communication that surrounds the genealogical data, as well as studying the family organizational structure, this study will contribute to the existing research regarding family history and family narrative. As many of these women are members of local genealogical societies, they are also able to address aspects of community membership, and the positioning of women within these organizations. To better understand the link between genealogy and family communication as it pertains to women, 22 participants (women conducting genealogy research) were interviewed. Study participants were interviewed regarding their genealogical data

collection, using open-ended questions guided by critical ethnographic methodology, which allowed the participants to elaborate on their answers, using their own words and/or voice. Responses were coded, utilizing methods provided by grounded theory. Coding revealed two themes, women's positioning within families and genealogical communities, and familial connections. From these themes seven categories were fleshed out; motivation to conduct genealogical research, K/knowing one's ancestors, the effect on family bonds, tracing race/class/fame via genealogy, the socio-historical positioning of women, the role of women in family systems, and the role of women within genealogical communities. As women and genealogy are both under-researched, this study works to illuminate the experiences of women genealogists, to understand the impact of genealogical data upon family communication, and to explore family genealogy as a site of feminist resistance to the socio-political marginalization of women.

*For my family,
K/known and not yet discovered.*

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CHAPTER I:
THE SPARK OF INTEREST

I remember the day very clearly. It was a Saturday afternoon in April, two years ago. I was hanging up clothes in the closet when I heard an unusual noise coming from my phone. Glancing at the caller id I am reminded that I gave my uncle a unique ring tone when I was expecting him to call and report the death of his mother, my grandmother. Two months had passed since then, and he sounded just as bad that sunny April Saturday as he did the day she died.

He tells me that he has been cleaning out my grandmother's home, and has found "the surprise of his life." His father, my grandfather, was adopted! The adoption record was tucked behind a photo of my grandfather, taken when he was about 4 years old. In my mind I can see the photograph that he is describing, sitting atop my grandmother's dresser. It was probably there my whole life, and I never once gave it a thought. Until today. I could hear the surprise and betrayal in my uncle's voice. Citing information contained in the adoption record he told me my grandfather's birth name was John Zibley. We discussed some other information, and eventually wrapped up the conversation, each engrossed with our own thoughts about this new twist in our family story. As I hung up the phone I remember saying to myself "Holy shit, I'm a Zibley!"

That was the day I became hooked on family genealogy. The haste with which I was willing to claim a Zibley identity immediately brought up fears and doubt about what that would really mean. Who were these people? Where did they come from? What was the story behind my grandfather's birth and subsequent adoption? Are there other Zibleys? Do they walk among us?

I turned to the only source I had handy at that moment – the Internet. After conducting a general web search for the keywords Zibley and Maryland (the state of adoption) I stumbled upon a genealogy website called www.genealogy.com, where I was offered a free two week trial membership. Figuring I had nothing to lose, I signed up and began my search for John Zibley. After about an hour of searching census data, birth, and death records for the state of Maryland I was still drawing a blank. I began to question both the validity of the data provided by www.genealogy.com and my own Internet acumen.

Remembering my years of academic research training, I tried a new approach: starting with names of family members I already knew, connections already forged. I initially had trouble finding records for my maternal grandparents, which I now know is because their data will remain protected until their death. I was, however, successful in finding information about my paternal grandmother (the spouse of John Zibley/Arthur Smith, Sr.) and my father. From there I began working backwards, filling gaps where I could, combing through documents and files,

searching discussion board postings at genealogy research websites, and learning how to input the data I did find into a customizable family tree that came with my membership to www.genealogy.com.

By this point, afternoon had turned to evening, which then morphed in to night, and early morning. I had managed to take care of the mundane chores, such as walking the dog and feeding myself, but otherwise I seemed to have entered a vortex where time stopped and family connections were all that mattered. When I finally wound down enough to attempt sleep, I lay in bed making lists of questions to ask my living family members. Those conversations led to more genealogy research, which led to more questions, creating an unbreakable cycle. What I have learned in these two years is that, yes, I am a Zibley. And a Smith, and a Lozier. A Haack, and a Lang too.

With each new piece of family data I found, each new family story I collected, I began to see a shift in the way my family communicated with me about this data. Older family members were happy to share their stories with me, pleased that someone was taking an interest in generations gone by. Younger family members, especially those I was not particularly close with, were now communicating with me, sharing their information and asking me to share my findings with them. I began to notice that my foray into family genealogy was working to bring me closer to many members of my family. These experiences got me to thinking about my own

motivation for continuing my search. Part of it was my stubbornness, as I still had not found the Zibley link, but another part of it was because I was enjoying the connections I was forging, both with living and deceased relatives. It was nice to know where I came from. Did other amateur genealogists feel this way too? Why did they start looking? What kept them going?

And so the scholar in me began to poke around... I began with the broad category of family communication, searching for studies or literature that discussed family genealogy or family history. While there is a plethora of literature regarding family communication, I was quite surprised to find only one study, "Genealogy as an Ethnographic Enterprise" (Combs, 2003), related to family genealogy. Further, Combs' study does not focus on the intersection between family genealogy and family communication, but rather highlights the similarities between genealogical research and ethnographic research.

In addition to the dearth of research regarding family genealogy I came to find family communication scholarship lacking in other areas, such as studies utilizing critical and interpretive methods of inquiry (Stamp, 2004). Family communication research that does utilize these methods is often categorized in sub-fields other than family communication, such as interpersonal or relational communication. Similarly, while there is feminist research being conducted that examines the family structure,

this work is usually affiliated with Women's Studies rather than being situated within the Communication discipline.

Considering the available research, this study works to address several of the gaps found in family communication scholarship. By examining the family communication that typically surrounds genealogical data, as well as the impact that data has upon the organizational structure of the family I aim to highlight the importance family history and family narrative have upon family identity.

Family Genealogy and Family Communication

Family genealogy research, or the study of one's ancestral lineage, has grown exponentially over the past decade, due in no small part to the proliferation of Internet search services available to amateur genealogists.¹ As noted above, this surge in popularity warrants a better understanding of the impact genealogy has upon family communication and family identity.

¹ In September 1999 Ancestry.com reported 880 unique visitors (Family tree sites, 1999). By comparison, in March 2007 the same site reported 4.5 million unique visitors (Ancestry.com 2007 Media Kit). Ancestry.com is the largest online family history site, with 800,000 subscribers.

Family genealogy research requires a large amount of time and energy (see Appendix E for further description). While there are professional genealogists, many individuals, like myself, seek to trace their own family line as an endeavor in personal growth and satisfaction. The level of commitment to this research varies with each individual. For some of us, the search involves logging into a computer database designed for amateur genealogists and tracking down records and documents that trace the family line. For others it involves a more hands-on process; traveling to ancestral lands (national or international), seeking documents through courthouses and libraries, and examining gravestones and cemeteries for clues.

Additionally, others are interested in a simple recording of the family history via the narrative accounts of living members. Kornhaber (1996) reports that family oral history management is a task often undertaken by grandparents. Descriptions of family history, oral or written, are often separated from discussions surrounding family genealogical data. Typically the term genealogy is used to represent the data (names, dates, lineage) of a family, while family history indicates the stories associated with entire families and/or individual family members. While this separation is a common one, it is not a wholly accurate distinction. Family genealogical data is inextricably linked to family history. Thus, family history should be viewed as an element used to represent family genealogy data, not as something separate from it.

Gender also plays a role in the collection of family genealogical data. Despite Kornhaber's (1996) finding that family oral histories are managed by grandparents' of either gender, demographic data collected by leading on-line genealogy service providers shows that women are more likely to be registered users than men.² Since women are still largely responsible for all elements of family care giving, this is not a surprising finding.

Just as women have relied upon other women for help and support, many people involved in the field of amateur genealogy turn to others who are similarly engaged for assistance. This assistance can range from retrieval of locally available documents to confirmation of names and/or dates in a family line. As people begin to fill in the blanks of their family line it becomes readily apparent that individuals are only removed from one another by small degrees of separation. Those involved in the realm of family genealogy have developed a true sense of community, regardless of whether they conduct their research in the face-to-face or online worlds.

² Demographic information for Ancestry.com shows that approximately 25% more women visit the site than men. This statistic is consistent throughout multiple snapshots of user demographics (Family tree sites, 1999; M. Ward, personal communication, April 28, 2008).

Genealogy Communities

The body of literature surrounding different types of communities is vast; thus, a brief overview of genealogy communities is warranted here. Subscription-based online genealogical services and local/state genealogical societies both function as “open” communities. Open communities refer to the criteria present in joining these communities. These sites are open to all people who are interested in exploring their family roots. Another similarity between online and face-to-face genealogy communities is the cost associated with membership. While membership dues vary, there is a fee required to gain access to these communities and their databases. Although it is possible to become a member of some virtual genealogy communities, and access list serves and discussion boards for free, a member must pay a monthly or yearly fee to access the databases useful in tracing family lineages. Similarly, local and state genealogy societies often survive on monthly or yearly dues from their members. One difference between the two types of communities, however, is size of membership. While a local or state society may have very limited membership, topping out in the hundreds at most, the communities of online genealogical sites have hundreds of thousands of members.

Aside from financial costs and open access, there are other visible connections between virtual and local genealogy communities. The first of these is rather obvious - they are both communities. In a traditional “brick and mortar” community, the

members are geographically close to one another, and come together to achieve like-minded goals. Similarly, virtual community members come together, but in very different ways. Virtual communities have no brick and mortar structure; rather they rely upon a myriad of Internet-based communication methods or computer-mediated communication (CMC). It is, however, not uncommon for face-to-face genealogy communities to utilize the Internet and/or CMC as a method of information dissemination amongst group members.

In addition to these genealogy communities being open, they are also imagined communities. Anderson (1991) argues that communities are often *imagined*, meaning that they are forged upon invisible and changing affiliations. My research in to genealogy communities leads me to agree with him, as I believe it is the very nature of these invisible affiliations that allow members to come together as a community to understand their own interconnectedness. This is evident in the “share and share alike” mentality behind most genealogical societies. Members are usually glad to share their data with one another, often out of genuine goodwill, and the occasional hope that someone will return the favor to them someday. This sharing mentality is also common among feminist, or inclusive, communities (Simmons, 2002). Genealogy narratives work to grant community members equality with one another, rather than centering on socio-cultural differences, such as race and class.

Genealogy: A Site for Resistance

Genealogical narratives are often centered on canonical family stories such as births, marriages, and deaths. “Existential turning points” (Jorgenson & Bochner, 2004, p. 527), or stories from the margins, like my grandfather’s adoption, are often left out of this data because these stories are unique rather than universal. When these stories are left unexamined the impact they have is left unexplained, thereby making it more challenging to understand how the family identity is created and maintained. Further, when these “non-canonical” stories are examined, it is evident that within genealogical data as well as family stories, the role of women is often relegated to the margins. Although studies of women’s lives have increased significantly in recent decades, the standpoint(s), or perspective(s), of women has historically been marginalized, particularly as women continue to be wholly responsible for domestic and family care. Still, the increase in access and community membership surrounding family genealogy does present a unique opportunity to gain insight into the rationale of women conducting this research for themselves and their families.

By conducting research that documents women’s experiences with genealogy, scholars are better able to see the political constructions of sexist oppression, as well as possible sites for resistance. In reframing the narrative that serves as family history, individuals are able to resist further justification of this oppression. Through

open discussions regarding unique family histories it becomes easier to both understand the socially constructed world in which family ancestors lived, as well as see the impact those social constructions have on today's family members. While membership in genealogical communities is not gender specific, online genealogy services do report a higher number of users as women. This study explores the connection between women and genealogical research by examining the ways in which inherited familial narratives work to position women within American culture.

Interviewing women who are engaged in the act of researching their own family genealogy provides insight into the motivation they feel to conduct such research. As many of these women are members of local genealogical societies, they are also able to elaborate on the differences and similarities present in their community and family roles and the responsibilities they feel to each. Informed by critical ethnography, these interviews focused on the participants' lived experience (Madison, 2005) with regard to genealogy data and research. Subsequent coding and analysis utilized grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to best highlight the interview data.

In documenting the family communication that surrounds the genealogical data, as well as studying the family organizational structure, this study will contribute new awareness to family history and family narrative. Responding to

Combs (2003) call to view genealogy as a tool for understanding family and social life, this study contributes to family communication theory by examining the impact family genealogy has on the communication between family members. As this study focuses exclusively on women genealogists, it also works to enhance feminist standpoint and feminist community scholarship. To gain the most insight into the connection between women, genealogy, and family communication, multiple research questions were asked:

RQ1: What motivation do women have in documenting their family lineage?

RQ2: What impact does the genealogical data have on family communication?

RQ3: What types of injustices (historically or current) do women encounter throughout their genealogical research, and how do they seek to overcome these injustices?

RQ4: How does membership in the genealogical community impact the views of women regarding the importance of genealogical data collection?

Organization of the Study

To best report the findings of these research questions, this study is organized into six chapters. In this first chapter I have focused on articulating the importance of

the study, along with underscoring the contribution this research makes to existing family communication scholarship. This chapter also provides a brief overview into each element of the study, along with the research questions that guide the work.

The second chapter examines existing literature regarding family communication, feminist standpoint theory, and community, and introduces the theoretical framework of this research project. Research by scholars such as Fisher (1984, 1987), Baxter and Braithwaite (2002), Jorgenson and Bochner (2004), and Goodall (2005, 2006) is examined to better understand the ways narrative and family story are used to convey meaning and shape family identity. Theories useful in describing the positionality and function of individual family members, including family systems theory (Littlejohn, 1999), family role theory (Yerby, Buerkel-Rothfuss, & Bochner, 1995), and family network theory (Galvin & Brommel, 1996) are also discussed. To better understand the specific roles of women I draw upon literature from feminist scholarship, particularly that of feminist standpoint theory, such as research conducted by hooks (1984), Trinh (1989), Collins (1990), Naples (2003), and Harding (2007). Lastly I provide an overview of different types of communities, such as face-to-face (McMillan & Chavis, 1986), virtual (Blanchard & Markus, 2004), imagined (Anderson, 1991), and feminist (Ashcraft, 2001).

The third chapter outlines the methods of inquiry utilized in this study. The first of these is critical ethnography, which highlights the relationship between the

researcher and the researched (Noblit, Flores, & Murillo, 2004). Recognition of the importance of this relationship is crucial to understanding how the standpoint of the researcher may affect not only the study, but also the standpoint of the researched. In conjunction with feminist standpoint theory, discussed in chapter two, critical ethnography allows the participants voice(s) to be heard throughout the study, opening a space to understand the impact of family genealogy research upon their lives. An overview of the study's participants, interview questions, and interview procedures are also presented in this chapter. The second method of inquiry discussed in chapter three is grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Following a framework for data coding and analysis presented by Dey (1999), I present the themes and categories that arose in the participant interviews.

Chapters four and five each discuss the data as provided by the participants. Chapter four specifically addresses the motivation behind conducting genealogical research, as well as the impact it has on family communication. This chapter discusses participants' (perceived) difference between family *story* and family *facts* and the role family genealogy plays in strengthening or weakening family communication, particularly between extended family members.

Chapter five focuses on the roles women play within the family and within genealogy communities. This chapter outlines the benefits and costs associated with community membership in conjunction with the responsibility of women to provide

domestic and familial care. Also discussed in this chapter is the socio-historical positioning of women within society, contrasted with the roles women play within genealogical communities. By understanding the ways women are granted authority within these communities connections and comparisons can be drawn regarding their social and familial positions, allowing for genealogical spaces to function as a site of resistance to patriarchal oppression.

Chapter six further elaborates on the connections between genealogical research, community, and family communication. Focusing on the contribution made by studies such as this one, I discuss areas open to future study with regard to family genealogy, calling upon future researchers to remember that women's stories are useful in subverting patriarchal cultural values in different ways. By adding value to these stories, families are also adding value to the familial labor performed by women. Women may then be able to reposition their stories as a tool for resisting further devaluing. An example of this might include honoring women's contributions to the home rather than viewing these acts as required domestic chores. These stories serve as a record, a documented history of the family, and thus create a space for better understanding the organizational structure of the family, as well as family communication patterns.

CHAPTER II:
MEETING YOUR ANCESTORS

Family story not only comprises a large part of communication within the family, but it also tells the history of a particular family. Oral narratives and family artifacts are two primary methods of spreading family history, both within and outside of the family. The stories and memories shared by family members tell others where the family has been, from whom the family came, and how it is that the family constructs its own reality. Family members also collaborate, using stories and rituals, to create shared realities of the family (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2002). Jorgenson and Bochner (2004) describe family stories and rituals as “symbolic links to the past, performed in the present” (p. 518). These stories and rituals allow families to streamline their experiences into a unified *family* identity. Additionally, understanding family history allows family members to better understand themselves. It also gives them a way to understand how their individual viewpoints align with those around them. Because of these reasons why individuals want to locate and understand their family history, the research questions and theoretical underpinnings of this study draw upon existing literature in the following areas: 1) family communication; 2) feminist standpoint theory; and, 3) community.

Family Communication

The concept of family is very broad, and thus certain terms have become standard for defining particular family dimensions (Schmeeckle & Sprecher, 2004). Immediate family is used to describe the nuclear family. While there are many variations of the nuclear family, for the purposes of this study it will include co-habiting (either married or un-married) adult partners, and the children of either one or both of those partners.

Extended family, sometimes referred to as kinship, consists of familial relationships beyond those of the nuclear family. While critical scholars such as Butler (2004) take the stance that same-sex partnerships fall under the umbrella term of kinship, my study classifies those unions as belonging to that of immediate family, and relies upon a broader recognition of kinship. Johnson (2000) defines kinship as “social relationships among those related by blood, marriage, or self-ascribed association that extend beyond the marital [sic] dyad, the nuclear family of parents and dependent children, or one-parent households” (p. 625).

Extended family members may include grandparents/grandchildren, cousins, aunts/uncles, and adult siblings. Those outside of the family bloodline who interact within the family as if they were members (such as in-laws or close friends) may also be considered extended family. From a historical perspective, the lengths and closeness of family relationships have seen a shift (Schmeeckle & Sprecher, 2004).

Longer life spans, as well as more economical methods of communicating have made closeness between extended family members more feasible. One example of this may be seen in the fact that grandchildren and grandparents are closer today than they have been in previous generations. Additionally, grandparents are utilizing newer forms of communication technology to maintain this closeness, as can be seen in Harwood's (2004) study of websites developed/managed by grandparents, finding that when older family members utilize websites, age is not as significant of a factor in relationships with younger family members.

Family Story

Understanding the family unit is important because families construct their reality together, through a blending of family narratives, experiences, and artifacts. This blending is often accomplished through storytelling, and these stories within families have multiple purposes. Jorgenson and Bochner (2004) list four ways stories are useful in family communication: first, stories are a means for family members to perform and transform their identities; second, stories are a demonstration of family values, beliefs, desires, and aspirations; third, stories are canonical (courtship stories, birth stories, survival stories); and finally, stories are evocative when they come from the margin (margin stories often resist canonical status). Family researchers, Jorgenson and Bochner state, are responsible for interpreting family story, as well as

holding up images of the family. Furthermore, Coontz (1992) seeks to dispel the notion of academic and media representations of family throughout history; an ongoing problem of idealized family representation(s) exists within family communication data. Jorgenson and Bochner (2004) attribute this idealization to the lack of margin stories, arguing that true family identity rests within stories that resist canonization. As family researchers we are engaged in an ongoing process of sense-making with our research participants (2004). Researching the way family stories are used within family communication is critical to understanding not only family culture, but also individual communication patterns.

Researchers must also learn to understand the family unit because individuals learn to communicate within the structure of families (Kellas, 2005). Family culture and story make up a large part of what is being communicated to/with family members during these interactions. These methods of communicating become ingrained in members' own communication patterns, often staying with them for life. As communication scholars, it is important that we research not only the individual communication styles, but also the family culture(s) and family communication patterns by which individuals are raised. Family story is one method for examining these patterns, because stories constructed within/by families reflect the culture(s) of that family. The stories told among family members provide a tool to better understand how communication works to build and sustain family identity and

family functioning (2005). Identity and function are critical elements of the larger family culture(s).

Family Memory

One space that families often draw upon for stories is memory. In dealing with memory as a site for research, accuracy is a key concern. Over time memories tend to fade, or blend, leaving the owner to question their truthfulness. At times, others who have memories of the same event may contest claims of truth. Research utilizing memory, however, should be less concerned about the overall truthfulness of a memory. Instead, what should be examined is the impact of the memory on the individual or family. This is not to say that memories should be wholly fabricated, but rather that inconsequential details need not be labored over.

Memory can have a powerful impact, as demonstrated by Poulos' (2006) research depicting family healing through memory. Examining his own family memories, Poulos looks at the way his family utilized these memories as a tool to work through the grief family members felt surrounding the death of loved ones. Examining memories for their meaning is a common practice in genealogy research. Over time memories evolve into shared stories which eventually come to shape the overall family identity.

Understanding the impact of memories (and stories) on individual and family identity is significant when researching family genealogy. Bochner and Ellis (1996) argue that the question regarding the accuracy of memory shouldn't be "how is it true?" but rather "how is it useful?" Denzin (2003) reinforces this sentiment, arguing that telling the "emotional truth," getting to the deeper meaning behind the memory is more important than factual accuracy. Examining meaning and truth within family memories is a critical step toward full awareness of the bearing those memories have upon the family story and/or the family identity.

Equally important to research involving memory is the ability to place memories into context and reframe particular events. Trujillo (2002, 2004) explores this ability when looking at gender relations within his own family. Citing an instance of infidelity, Trujillo puts the memory into context by placing it within a historical frame. He is then able to reframe the memory, through a retelling of the story, to recognize the injustices and oppression of women present during that historical period. Reframing memories, as well as contextualizing them, allows them to be understood in the moment, while also demonstrating how they are useful as a site for research.

Theories of Family Communication

While the field of family communication research is broad, and houses various areas of foci, such as family organization, family dialectics, and gender roles within the family, there are dominant modes of inquiry and theoretical underpinnings. In his work surveying 1,254 family communication studies, Stamp (2004) found that most family communication research is conducted utilizing empirical methods of inquiry (91.87%). Interpretive methods of inquiry comprised 6.46% of these studies, while studies utilizing critical methods of inquiry made up only 1.67%. These studies were informed by multiple theories, either individually or collectively. Several of these theories, such as family systems theory, family role theory, and family network theory, are relevant to my current study. These theories focus on the ways family functions as a unit, and inform this study with regard to the roles and positionality of women within the family structure.

Family Systems Theory

The first of these theories is family systems theory. Littlejohn (1999) states that families function within a system. Qualities of the family system include hierarchy, interaction with the environment, change and adaptability, and wholeness and interdependence. Yerby, Buerkel-Rothfuss, and Bochner (1995) argue that family systems theory is reliant upon a focus on the relationships between members of the

family. Family systems theory is a crucial element to understanding how family members work within the system to maintain harmony, as well as the repercussions of violating norms/expectations.

Family Role Theory

A second theory documented by Yerby, et al. (1995) is family role theory. Again, the authors focus on the relationships between family members, arguing that each person has her or his own role within the family. Roles describe the “set of prescribed behaviors that a family member performs in relation to other family members” (1995, p. 255). This includes family negotiation regarding each member’s place within the family structure. One example of family role relegation often seen in family genealogy research is the (gendered) division of family labor expectations. Typically the family genealogist is a woman, often older in age, with children and grandchildren. Family roles are also clearly designated in many family stories, again often along gendered lines, such as who was responsible for outside labor versus domestic labor.

Family Network Theory

A third theory useful in examining the impact of family genealogy on family communication is family network theory. Continuing to look at the relationship

amongst family members, family network theory examines the exchange of resources/information within the family unit, as well as with significant non-family persons (Galvin & Brommel, 1996). These internal and external networks function to provide support and information to the family unit. Networks may also assist in organizing tasks and serve to facilitate decision-making within the family network. Family network theory is most useful when looking at how extended familial relationships are altered by family genealogy research.

Family Communication and Family Genealogy

Turning specifically to the intersection of communication studies and family genealogy, my study draws upon the work of Combs (2003), one of the only communication scholars to have published scholarly research regarding the subject. In his text, Combs calls for ethnography to serve as a metaphor for family genealogy research. Arguing that genealogy is traditionally equated with a social-scientific methodological approach, Combs seeks to find a more useful description of genealogy than the systematizing of method. Ultimately what Combs is arguing, and what I am using as the underpinning of my research is that when people limit themselves to the gather, sort, compile structure of collecting genealogical data, they are removing the social relationships that bind the family/genealogical structure.

Therefore, Combs (2003) moves away from the realm of genealogy as science, and illustrates the similarities between genealogy research and ethnographic research. One of these similarities is in the role of the researcher. Combs states, "... one cannot divorce that person from the act of observing, except artificially" (p. 248). In genealogy research, like in ethnography, the researcher alters the data by their presence, ideas, and emotions. A second similarity Combs draws upon is in the study of the social aspects of one's life. Ethnographers, like family genealogists, seek to understand the context, or reality, of the subject's life. While genealogists often research those who are long deceased, the act of researching that person extends their life into the present. Additionally, genealogists, like ethnographers, have many opportunities to interview living family members to record their data and stories. Unlike ethnographers, however, genealogists do not have to *work* to gain access to a given site because they are usually bestowed that privilege through their existing membership in the family.

Combs (2003) further states, "Understood as an ethnographic enterprise, genealogy can offer much insight regarding how a family and its members experience themselves, both now and in the distant past" (p. 251). As the family is an ever-changing and growing entity, the need for additional family communication research is ongoing. Combs calls for communication scholars to utilize genealogy as a tool for understanding social life, particularly social aspects that derive from the

family. Taking a broader perspective on family communication research, Galvin (2004) argues the family of the future will:

- 1) Reflect an increasing diversity of self-conceptions, evidenced through structural as well as cultural variations, that will challenge current family scholars to abandon their historical, nucleocentric biases, unitary cultural assumptions, and implied economic and religious assumptions.
- 2) Search for new ways to protect and enhance family life. This will necessitate a greater understanding of varied religious and ethnic underpinnings of family life, as they relate to a reinvigoration of spiritual, educational, and governmental family enrichment and psychoeducational efforts. This must be accompanied by increased attention to family ecosystem concerns related to areas such as communities and neighborhoods (p. 676).

She goes on to articulate the need for more family communication research centering around technological changes, stating advances in technology will continue to change the family structure, as well as its communication patterns; technological advancements create more possibilities for both seeking and preserving family data.

Narrative

One of the many ways family communication research can be enhanced is through the collection and analysis of family narratives. The study of personal narratives is a relatively new focus in communication research, having come into popularity over the last three decades. Bochner (1994) describes these studies as the examination of individual or group stories regarding that person or group's lived experiences. Personal narratives are often centered on an event significant to the teller, and may convey information about the construction of reality within that circumstance. Ideas surrounding relational identity and/or issues of morality may also be present (Riessman, 1993).

Storytelling is often seen as a method for creating and sustaining narrative coherence. This coherence is sought as a tool to combat life's uncertainties and unexpected detours in the path (Jorgenson & Bochner, 2004). Communication, Peterson and Langellier (2006) argue, *is* storytelling. Communication is not only about performing something (poesis), but also about doing something (praxis). This "doing" is represented in storytelling (2006). These stories often take different shapes, such as song, poetry, or oral narratives (Lengel, 2004). In the case of genealogy research, they often come to light as family data is discovered and facts are confirmed.

Scholars, like family genealogists, must also take their own lived experiences into account. Autoethnography, or the theorizing of personal experience, allows researchers to investigate their own stories (Bochner & Ellis, 2006). Understanding how these experiences are not only individual, but also cultural, allows us to better understand the world around us, as well as the part we play in constructing that world. When we, as researchers, theorize our own personal experiences, our own stories, we are not just examining ourselves, but rather ourselves in conjunction with the others whom we interact with. We are always in relation to another (if not multiple others). This is particularly true when examining the ways in which we are connected to, and shaped by, our interactions with family. Ellis (1996) demonstrates this when she investigates her own identity as a childless woman juxtaposed with her identity as a caregiver to her ailing mother. Explaining that the act of caring for someone so intimately calls into question her decision not to have children, Ellis is able to reflect on her choices, as well as on her relationship with her mother. Her connection with her mother allows her to better understand her own identity while simultaneously reflecting on the societal concept of woman as mother.

Thus story is an integral part of family communication and a necessary vehicle for my research on this topic. It serves as a historical marker, a guide to values and beliefs, and teaches appropriate ways of communication. In their argument to classify genealogy, family history, and biography as family narrative, Langellier and

Peterson (1993) state, "family narratives emerge more fragmentarily, circumstantially, and promiscuously than is suggested by the deliberate, continuous, and complete flavors of these terms" (p. 56). Arguing that family genealogy is a term that limits the function of family story, they go on to discuss the performative nature of family culture as a strategic process that calls the family into being. In researching story, lived experiences, and rituals, researchers are better able to understand communication patterns within and across families. These patterns often cross cultural and socio-economic boundaries. By examining these stories constructed and inherited in families, researchers are better able to understand the impact family communication has on the communication patterns of individual family members.

Narrative Paradigm

Viewing these experiences through the lens of narrative paradigm, in conjunction with theories such as narrative inheritance, offer a means of organizing them within the communication discipline. Examining lived experiences, or the events that shape our world, is useful in understanding which stories get selected, and the meanings behind them. Fisher (1984, 1987) examines story selection in his discussion of the narrative paradigm. Arguing that people are storytellers by nature, Fisher states that all communication is story-based. In constructing our own reality we look for stories that are coherent to us, and seek fidelity with our own beliefs and

values. We select the stories we tell, thereby creating our own world. It is in the telling of these stories that we are able to create ourselves. To carry this one step further, when families select the stories told within/by family members, a family culture is created. In this creation, members are better able to understand who they are within the family, as well as how their role affects others within the family.

Still, Fisher's (1984, 1987) research regarding the narrative paradigm is not without its critics. Foremost among the concerns regarding narrative as communication is the idea of story selection, or what makes one story better than another? In her extension of Fisher's work, Opt (1988) argues that rather than focusing on the description and evaluation of story, researchers should instead focus on the continuous change and process of storytelling. To do this we will be able to take into account that while one's stories may change over time, the process and patterns of sense making is always ongoing.

Another critique centers on the claim that all forms of discourse can be seen as types of narrative. Rowland (1989) tests this theory by applying the narrative paradigm to three different works: a book on religious fundamentalism, a film focusing on Pat Robertson, and a science fiction novel focusing on the biblical story of Job. The results of his study found that narrative approaches are rendered useless when examining discourse that does not tell a story. Further, Rowland argued that

coherence and fidelity were not applicable to some works, such as science fiction and fantasy.

Despite these critiques, Fisher's (1984, 1987) narrative paradigm has been applied in multiple contexts, from individual dyadic relationships to media portrayals of human interaction. In fact, Roberts (2004) calls for the fields of communication and folklore to come together at the intersection of the narrative paradigm. Building upon Fisher's aspects of narrative (coherence and fidelity), Roberts adds democracy and personhood as markers of human knowledge transforming into lived action. For Roberts, narrative is democratic because it is open to everyone, regardless of their performance abilities. Through the performance, narrator and audience form a connection, which allows a shift away from the individual and toward that of a collective (personhood).

Narrative Inheritance

Building on Fisher's concept of homo narrans (Fisher, 1984), or humans as storytellers, Goodall (2005, 2006) takes a similar perspective when introducing what he calls the theory of narrative inheritance. He explains that narrative inheritance is the handing down of family story, allowing individuals to understand family culture and family rituals. These stories help us better understand our own families within a particular socio-cultural context, as well as inform our own identities. When the

inherited narratives are complete they become part of the family history. However, Goodall argues, when narratives are incomplete they become ours to finish. Using his own family as an example, Goodall discusses how he inherited his father's incomplete narrative. Compelled to pass on a completed narrative to his own child, Goodall began researching his father's life as a CIA agent during the Cold War, leading to a better understanding of his own narrative.

Goodall (2008) also addresses issues of self-presentation throughout his research. Examining his own role in his troubled family history, Goodall is quick to take ownership of particular situations. He is not the hero coming in to expose the flaws, but rather a flawed individual who must first understand his own role before he can understand the roles of others. Trujillo (2004) also explores his own familial role in contrast with his role as researcher. Revealing deeply personal issues such as his grandmother's anorexia and probable abortion, as well as his own troubled relationship with his father, Trujillo draws upon cultural markers of identity to situate the family story. Both of these authors made choices with regard to personal and familial disclosure. It is left to the reader to make use of these narratives and give them meaning within her or his own life. Entering the examination of family narrative through one's own story is often the best place to start (Goodall, 2005). Entering through your own story, however, does not automatically give you the right to present that story to the world. Personal stories always involve others (Ellis,

2007). It is important for researchers to reflect not only on their own actions, but also on the impact their narratives may have on others. This act of self-reflection on the part of researchers is also critical when employing feminist theories and methodologies.

Feminist Theories

Feminist theories focus on the construction of gender within relational situations as well as within society at large. Centering around three common beliefs, feminist theories examine: how gender is socially constructed, the ways that oppressive conditions sustained by patriarchy are commonplace, and the ways in which women experience more inequality within marriage and family life than men do (Glenn, 1987; Littlejohn, 1999). Feminist theories offer intellectual tools for individuals to better understand the oppressions with which they are confronted. These tools allow a space to build arguments that support political change. Scholars engaged in feminist theories/research believe the most important element of theory is to inform effective politics. McCann and Kim (2003) underline this point: "Feminist theorists apply their tools to building knowledge of women's oppression and, based on that knowledge, to developing strategies for resisting subordination and improving women's lives" (p. 1).

Built on the tenets of feminism, feminist theories seek to address oppressions related to gender discrimination. hooks (1984) defines feminism as “the struggle to end sexist oppression” (p. 26). hooks elaborates, arguing that feminism does not seek to benefit any particular group, race, or class of women, but rather works to benefit all women by eliminating sexism. The vast array of methods utilized to achieve this goal can be seen throughout research drawing upon feminist theories.

Qualitative feminist studies create spaces where women’s voices can be heard. One method for accomplishing this is through the use of women’s stories. Trinh (1989) separates story from history, arguing that history serves as an accumulation of facts, while story provides a deeper meaning and context: “If we rely on history to tell us what happened at a specific time and place, we can rely on story to tell us not only what might have happened, but also what is happening at an unspecified time and place” (p. 120). Trinh moves this argument forward with the idea of story repetition. Arguing that no repetition is ever the same, she makes the claim that each story carries with it both *their* story and *our* story. In other words, we add our own history in each retelling of a story.

While Trinh (1989) focuses on the blending of story with history, Furman, Kelly, and Nelson (2005) seek to understand how their unique standpoints infuse their stories while still unifying women across their differences. These authors came together to share their life narratives, which they view as a political act. This allowed

them to work at an interdisciplinary level, as well as to take into account the rich history of women who came before them. Seeking to infuse the “kitchen-table tradition” of women’s storytelling with value, Furman, Kelly, and Nelson draw upon their own family histories as a way of understanding diasporic border crossings and boundary transgressions.

Standpoint Theory

Research utilizing a framework of feminism and feminist theories heavily informs my own research. In particular, I call upon the existing literature surrounding standpoint theory. Individual viewpoints, often referred to as standpoints, are important to investigate when researching family communication patterns. Individual perspectives color our views of the world around us, shaping and shifting our own perceptions. These views influence our interpretations of family stories, as well as our performance as family members, making standpoint theory useful in researching family communication.

Feminist standpoint theory began taking hold in the latter part of the 20th century, in conjunction with the 2nd wave feminist movement (1960s – present).³

³ There is much debate regarding the endpoint of 2nd Wave feminism in conjunction with the beginning of 3rd Wave. For a comprehensive discussion regarding

Harding (2007) summarizes early feminist standpoint research, listing four goals commonly found throughout this research:

- 1) To explain in a more accurate way relations between androcentric institutional power and the production of sexist and androcentric knowledge claims; 2) to account for the surprising successes of research in the social sciences and biology that were overtly guided by feminist politics; 3) to provide guidelines for future politics; and, 4) to provide a resource for the empowerment of oppressed groups (p. 45).

Naples (2003) moves beyond these goals by further identifying three approaches to standpoint construction: as constructed in community; as a site through which to begin inquiry; and, as embodied in women's social location and social experience.

Standpoint theory is particularly useful when looking at diverse populations, as it considers the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality that form a person's individual perspective, or standpoint. While not exclusive to issues of race, standpoint theory seeks to explore the impact that unique perspectives can offer women in resisting political and cultural oppression (Hartsock, 1998; O'Brien-

similarities and differences between these two waves, as well as a timeline for each please see Baumgardner, J., & Richards, A. (2000). *Manifesta: Young women, feminism, and the future*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Hallstein, 2000). Grounded in Marxism, standpoint theory works to understand how the lives and work of women have traditionally been devalued.

It is important to note, however, that there is a difference between (individual) *women's* standpoints and a (collective) *feminist* standpoint (Collins, 1990; Hartsock, 1998). While standpoint theory is useful in understanding individual viewpoints, it is not about an individual. Rather, the refusal to grant individuality to women allows them to form a collective standpoint useful in resisting sexist oppression. While individual standpoints are critical to understanding the unique perspectives of each woman, a feminist standpoint approach is interested in looking at how institutions of power obtain and/or maintain their dominance. This line of scholarly thought can be seen throughout the work of Collins (1998) and Sandoval (2000), where particular emphasis is placed upon standpoint as relational and/or representing a specific community.

Similarly, Hartsock (1998) argues that rather than being about the individual, standpoint theory is about a lack of individual freedom for marginalized people and groups. The collective that is formed gains strength from these individual identities, and creates a space to resist marginalization. One example of this can be seen in Ellis' (2003) article about family grave tending where she states that women should tend to the family graves. The expectation, and subsequent reality, that women will maintain and care for all aspects considered domestic within the family is well documented

(Brandler, 1998; Barker, 2005). Ellis reaffirms this notion by stating that grave tending *feels* (to her) like a task that should be done by women. As grave tending/burial research is a key element of genealogy research, the implications for women as family caretakers and genealogy researchers is clear; this is work that women feel they should be doing. By employing standpoint theory to examine the process of dialogue, analysis, and reflexivity researchers are utilizing a strong theoretical framework that resists the modern-postmodern divide while examining the social structures that shape our realities (Naples, 2007).

Community

Just as it is important to understand the individual standpoints of women, it is equally important to understand their collective viewpoint once a community has been formed. Amateur genealogists were among the first to develop and sustain Internet-based communities, beginning in the mid to late 1990s. More than a decade later, there are a multitude of websites dedicated to genealogical discussions and data.⁴ Similarly, there are thousands of face-to-face genealogical communities throughout the world. Regardless of physical presence, or lack thereof, members of genealogy communities form bonds with one another. They offer assistance, support, and guidance to local and global genealogy peers. Community members rely on one

⁴ An Internet search for “family genealogy” resulted in over 66 million websites.

another to work through failed data searches as well as to share in the joy when a research breakthrough has been made.

Assistance, support, and guidance contribute to members recognition of the group as a community, as they are elements found when people experience a sense of community (SOC). In their groundbreaking research on communities McMillan and Chavis (1986) define SOC as “a feeling that members (of a group) have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith the members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together” (p. 9). McMillan and Chavis’ framework of SOC dimensions include feelings of membership, feelings of influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. Citing the importance of online community research due to the ever-increasing number of Internet users, Blanchard and Markus (2004) take this one step further to better understand how people connect to create a sense of virtual community (SOVC). They state that, like SOC, there are certain things we can expect to see in a SOVC, such as recognition, identification, support, relationship, emotional attachment, and obligation.

Due to organizational structure, one significant difference between local genealogy communities and virtual genealogy communities is the authority granted to senior members within local societies. Members who have been conducting amateur genealogy research for long periods of time are sought after more heavily

for advice and guidance than newer members. Often these senior community members will serve the organization in an official capacity, in an officer or administrative position. In contrast, the anonymity present in virtual communities allows all members to be viewed as having similar experiences and abilities, unless members disclose otherwise. Virtual community members are often turned to for guidance and advice, but the expectation of service to the community is greatly reduced. As discussed above, women are more likely to be members of a genealogy community than men. This is true in both virtual and face-to-face, or local, genealogical communities.

Early research on traditional and virtual communities suggests that one should also expect to find: membership, boundaries, belonging, and group symbols (Baym, 1995, 1997; Greer, 2000; Herring, 1996; Kollock & Smith, 1994). Other identifying behaviors include influence (Baym, 1997; Kollock & Smith, 1994; Pliskin & Romm, 1997), exchange of support among members (Baym, 1997; Greer, 2000; Preece, 1999), and shared emotional connections among members (Greer, 2000; Preece, 1999). Members of virtual communities come to feel as though they participate in a community that offers much of the same interaction as a face-to-face community. They discuss, argue, fight, reconcile, amuse, and offend in their virtual communities, as they would in a traditional community. In early research the key difference cited between virtual and face-to-face communities was that in virtual

communities growth and development was limited to text-based messages present in an online environment (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002). It could be argued, however, that the increasing availability of visual and auditory messages in virtual environments significantly closes this gap, and will continue to do so as technological advancements are made.

Both traditional and online genealogical communities incorporate elements of SOC and SOVC, such as recognition, identification, support, relationship, emotional attachment, and obligation, in various ways. Another similarity between the two communities may be an emphasis on race and/or ethnicity. Many local/state genealogy societies place an emphasis on documenting the lineage of early settlers for their particular geographic area. In many instances this emphasis focuses on Native American heritage (Carpenter, 1991), but may also include an emphasis on dominant European ethnicities, if relevant. Online genealogy communities also focus on race and/or ethnic heritage, although in more subtle ways. These websites include helpful tips on surname spellings based on race or ethnic heritage. These spellings are closely linked with religious identity. Also, specific databases have been established to help people within particular diasporas track their ancestors. Some examples of this are the databases featuring information about the African slave

journey to America, including lineages of African-Americans who are descendants of the slaves listed.⁵

Imagined Communities

In his research on nationalism and national identity Anderson (1991) presents an alternate view of communities. While he recognizes the aspects present in SOC (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) and SOVC (Blanchard & Markus, 2004) stated above, Anderson argues that communities are formed based on imagined geographic boundaries. This argument, I would suggest, is born out of the crux of Anderson's research; nationalism. Looking at how nations and national identities are formed, Anderson refers to communities as groups of people linked to one another first and foremost by geographical markers. While this is a useful view of tribal or national communities, the lens of nationalism may obscure other features of community formation, such as common interests, member support, and emotional connections.

This is not to say that Anderson's (1991) research is not applicable to genealogy communities. As Anderson argues, geographic markers divide many communities, including genealogy societies. These markers are, as Anderson

⁵ See the Slave Schedule Census' from Ancestry (www.ancestry.com) or Freedman's Bank section of Heritage Quest Index (www.heritagequestonline.com) for examples.

discusses, often invisible and fluid. That is to say mere lines on a map differentiate those cities, counties, and countries from one another. These designations are useful for many purposes, such as regional identity, ownership, and taxation, but the lines can be reconsidered and/or redrawn at will, which will cause a shift in identity for the inhabitants.

Anderson (1991) points to three institutions of power which “profoundly shaped the way in which the colonial state imagined its dominion – the nature of the human beings it ruled, the geography of its domain, and the legitimacy of its ancestry” (p. 164). The first of these institutions is the census. Following the shift of identity categories from those based in religion to those based in race, Anderson discusses the problems with any such process of categorization. These problems stem from the long-held belief by census developers that everyone will fit in to one category exclusively, a notion still commonly believed today. The impact of systematic categorization via the census runs deep throughout the genealogical community, as census records are one of the primary sources of genealogical information researchers use.

The second institution useful in shaping the geography of one’s given domain is the map (Anderson, 1991). Maps were, and still are, useful for denoting and recognizing divisions in landmass and ownership. Used in conjunction with the census, maps are able to quantify numbers and types of people inhabiting particular

geographic regions. Shifts in land ownership, and subsequent map alterations, are a useful tool to genealogy researchers, as they are often an indicator of where particular records might be found. Maps, like censuses, also serve to provide genealogists with information about their ancestors' country of origin. This, as Anderson argues, may help to establish a sense of nationalism or allegiance to a particular country. This sense of nationalism is often in addition to, or rather, in conjunction with a family identity, and may serve as either a sense of pride or shame in the family's origin story.

The third and final institution of power identified by Anderson (1991) is the museum. The museum, he argues, functions as a socio-political institution designed to establish the legitimacy of colonial power in a particular domain. Working together with census and maps, museums operate to develop and sustain (imagined) community identities. In her research on the importance of local museums Levin (2007) also addresses the impact of community identity. Arguing that local museums play a central role in understanding community creation across geographic regions, Levin says "All museums tell narratives about culture – no matter how quirky, or dusty, or unprofessional they might seem. Local museums offer us glimpses at the contradictions and dilemmas evident in any effort to present or represent culture" (p. 25). This presentation of local culture is vital to understand how events were/are framed in a socio-historical context.

Feminist Communities

While it is important to understand how the framing of events and culture shape community identity, it is equally important to identify the impact generated by a feeling of inclusion or belonging. Similar to using family narratives to understand family identity, Simmons (2002) advocates for the use of narratives to build and sustain inclusive communities. These narratives, she argues, will reduce the possibility for the bias or marginalization often brought about by socio-cultural factors, such as race, class, and gender. Higgins (2002) echoes the call for a narrative approach to community building, citing specific feminist grassroots movements where this has been successful. Thus, narrative/ethnography is necessary not only to communication studies, but genealogy studies in particular, because without it we would be left with only charts, which cannot accurately represent the stories that create and shape families/communities.

Ashcraft (2001) states, "Lessons gleaned from feminist organization can inform and transform traditional ways of thinking and doing community; concurrently, they can illuminate obstacles and tensions that constrain "alternative" organizing" (p. 79). Arguing that communication scholars are best poised to research feminist communities, Ashcraft seeks to understand how these communities function, as well as to flesh out their strengths and weaknesses so that they may

serve as resistance models to the traditional, or hierarchical, community structure.

This resistance is critical when considering the type of social change feminist communities and feminist grassroots movements have been able to enact.

Turning specifically to feminist initiatives in community practice research, Hyde (2005) articulates constraints faced by traditional communities due to a lack of fluidity within community practice models (e.g., locality development, social planning, social action). Hyde's research indicates that rather than being held back by these models, feminist community practice blurs them, allowing community members to shift between types of community practices, moving between different strategies and tactics.

While it is important to note that genealogical communities, face-to-face or virtual, are not feminist communities, many of them do undertake feminist work. This can be seen largely in the reclamation of women's stories and history throughout the family. Similarly, while many genealogical communities are organized using a traditional/hierarchical (membership-elected officers) system, it is worth noting that many of the positions of power are held by women, thereby offering, at minimum, the opportunity for resistance and social change.

It is important to examine women's position(s) within face-to-face and virtual genealogical communities, as well as how those positions are affected by their unique standpoints, in order to create a space to better understand the impact of

genealogical research upon the family communication structure. This understanding may serve as an effective tool in repositioning women as valued members of society, thus working to end social injustices women face within a patriarchal framework.

CHAPTER III:
RELATIVE DATA COLLECTION

Family genealogists seek to find information about their ancestors, just as scholars engage in research designed to answer particular questions. My study investigates the link between women, family genealogy, and family communication, in an effort to understand the impact family genealogy has upon communication within the family. As part of this impact I examined the positioning of women, as genealogical researchers, within the family as well as within genealogical communities. Specifically, I sought to address the following research questions:

- RQ1: What motivation do women have in documenting their family lineage?
- RQ2: What impact does the genealogical data have on family communication?
- RQ3: What types of injustices (historically or current) do women encounter throughout their genealogical research, and how do they seek to overcome these injustices?
- RQ4: How does membership in the genealogical community impact the views of women regarding the importance of genealogical data collection?

In this chapter I discuss the guiding methodologies, critical ethnography and grounded theory, utilized in this study. Information is also included regarding participant selection, the interview process, data coding, and data analysis. Using the research questions as a guide, I drew upon these methodologies and processes because they allowed space for the participants to reflect upon their unique standpoints and family stories, which resulted in meaningful data.

Critical Ethnography

One of the primary methods of inquiry framing my research project is critical ethnography. Critical ethnography is sometimes described using other terms, such as performance ethnography (Denzin, 2003), new ethnography (Goodall, 2000), feminist ethnography (Sanger, 2003), and autoethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 1996). While each of these labels comes with a varied description, the common link between them is the positionality of the researcher with the subject. Noblit, Flores, and Murillo (2004) discuss this positionality by arguing that critical ethnographers must recognize how their own acts and accounts of those under study are acts of domination. Their statement calls into question the ethics of representation in ethnographic research.

Madison (2005) seeks to address these issues by asking researchers to “contextualize their own positionality” in such ways so that it is evident and open to

judgment and evaluation. She states, “we are not simply subjects, but we are subjects in dialogue with the Other” (p. 9). Clair (2003) articulates similar concerns with regard to language selections made by researchers. She states, “Communication and language are never neutral. Communication can be oppressive and act as a means of silencing different groups of people. However, communication also carries with it the possibilities for emancipation” (p. 15).

Denzin (2003) examines the ways in which performance (critical) ethnography can be utilized as a method of inquiry. Following Conquergood’s (1985) idea of performativity, Denzin argues that performance ethnography is a way of examining the *doing*, or performance, of lived experience(s). Madison (2005) also discusses the nature of critical ethnography as a methodological process, rather than a theory. Arguing that although theory may guide researchers as they develop their research, the tasks of interview design and data coding are part of the methodological process that directs the completion of the research project.

Jones (1998) describes critical ethnography as “asking questions about what experience means to us – now and over time” (p. 21). Madison (2005) furthers this description, arguing that critical ethnography seeks to examine injustice(s) within particular lived experiences. Critical ethnography works to disrupt these injustices by revealing the hidden power and control loci. To do this, researchers must utilize

the skills, privileges, and resources available to them to bring to light the marginalized voices that are often silenced in the telling (2005).

Still, critical ethnography is not without critics. These critiques focus largely on a lack of researcher objectivity, as well as the self-reflexivity researchers must engage in to conduct effective studies. In response to some of these critiques Goodall (2000) argues that new (critical) ethnography is “evolving to a higher state of scholarly consciousness” (p. 198). He goes on to discuss the benefits of this type of research in the academy, calling for a stronger, more diverse, humane scholarly community. New ethnographers possess a “*dialogic ethic*, and a *transformational vision*” (p. 198, emphasis in original). Concerns regarding the ethics of representation can be seen throughout research utilizing, and discussions surrounding critical ethnography. One area this is most prevalent in is feminist (critical) ethnography.

Feminist Ethnography

Pillow and Mayo (2007) argue that there is not *one* feminist methodology, but rather there are *multiple* methodological and epistemological lenses for carrying out feminist research agendas. Feminist ethnography is one such method useful in scholarship with a feminist aim. An issue central to feminist ethnography is that of power (Wolf, 1992). Feminist ethnographic research seeks to understand who holds the power, how it is used, and how it is manipulated to oppress particular people or

groups. Scholars conducting feminist research question and attempt to eliminate the hierarchies surrounding construction of knowledge (Presser, 2005). While there are many descriptions of the relationship between researcher and subject within feminist scholarship, Sanger (2003) does a nice job summarizing them when she states, "Feminists' concerns about the relationship between the researcher and the researched generally fall along four main lines of interest: the construction of the "Other"; possibilities of dialogical methods; trust; and, accountability" (p. 30).

Like the broader category of critical ethnography, feminist ethnography critics articulate concerns regarding researcher objectivity, or lack thereof. Taking to heart the feminist slogan "the personal is political" feminist researchers question the possibility of researcher objectivity, arguing that such objectivity is not useful or productive for many forms of scholarship. Instead, feminist researchers understand the impossibilities of any researcher maintaining objectivity, and know it is better to acknowledge this factor of research so more work can be done to improve effective research skills.

Reinharz (1992) categorizes feminist research as that which: focuses on understanding gender within the context of daily life; is committed to social change; and, is willing to explore the relationship between the researcher and the researched. The last of these can be seen in the willingness to allow researchers to conduct their research from a place of personal passion and interest. This shift away from

devaluing research that is personal allows feminist researchers to investigate phenomena that directly effects and impacts them. This movement presents the opportunity to fill in the gaps by examining that which was previously overlooked, devalued, or avoided (Lengel, 1998). As much of what has been overlooked directly impacts women and other marginal groups, feminist ethnographic research works to better understand the performativity of gender, particularly where it intersects with race, class, and sexuality (Pillow & Mayo, 2007).

Grounded Theory

The second method of inquiry informing my research project is grounded theory. Glaser and Strauss (1967) developed grounded theory as a way of coming to theories best suited for their supposed uses. That is to say, the data leads to the theory, not the other way around: "Grounded theory can help to forestall the opportunistic use of theories that have dubious fit and working capacity" (p. 4). In using grounded theory, researchers are better able to understand how the data both develops and supports the theory, rather than trying to make the data *fit* into pre-selected theories. Further, Glaser and Strauss state that there must be four interrelated criteria present when building theory:

- 1) The theory must closely fit the substantive area in which it will be used.
- 2) It must be readily understandable by laymen concerned with this area.

- 3) It must be sufficiently general to be applicable to a multitude of diverse daily situations within the substantive area, not to just a specific type of situation.
- 4) It must allow the user partial control over the structure and process of daily situations as they change through time (p. 237).

Strauss and Corbin (1998) continue the discussion of grounded theory's usefulness and applicability. In examining the characteristics of a researcher well suited for grounded theory they call for the following traits: ability to step back and critically analyze situations, ability to recognize the tendency towards bias, the ability to think abstractly, the ability to be flexible, the ability to be open to criticism, sensitivity to respondents' words and actions, and a devotion to the work in progress. These characteristics will never be fully developed if the researcher applies grounded theory in a rote, or textbook, fashion. Rather, they argue, grounded theory provides a sense of vision. It allows the researcher to follow the path laid forth by the participants and the data. The fluidity of grounded theory dovetails nicely with the aims of critical ethnography, in that it allows the participants to guide the research while also calling upon the researcher to understand her or his impact upon the study. Utilizing these two methodologies in concert with each other enabled me to design a study that would best address the research questions articulated above.

Participants

Building on the methodologies discussed above to better understand the link between genealogy and family communication as it pertains to women, I interviewed 22 women for this study. The participants ranged in age from 32 to 82. Of the 22 participants all but one self-identified as white, Caucasian, or North European. The remaining participant did not respond to that question, but could be classified as white-appearing. Yearly household income of the participants ranged from \$15,000 to over \$90,000, although some respondents reported that the current numbers reflected a decrease in income due to retirement. Each of the participants is an Ohio resident, mostly residing in rural counties in northwest Ohio. Five of the women reported being single, while the other 17 listed themselves as married or in a long-term partnership. Of the 22 participants, 18 have children, and many of those women reported having grandchildren as well. Participants' experience with family genealogy research varied, ranging from 1 month to 37 years. Nine participants had been conducting genealogy research for less than 1 year, 7 participants had been researching for between 1 and 15 years, and 6 participants had been researching their family data for between 16 and 37 years.

In addition to my own personal foray in to family genealogy, I spent approximately five months attending local genealogical society meetings and genealogy workshops, conducting and transcribing participant interviews, and

analyzing data. Attending these meetings and workshops allowed me to obtain a list of volunteers willing to participate in my study. In some cases I approached the society, either in person or via email/newsletters, introduced myself and my project, and asked women to contact me if they were willing to be interviewed.⁶ In other cases I was invited to attend free public workshops led by Becky Hill, head librarian and genealogy expert, at the Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Library.⁷ The Hayes

⁶ These included meetings held by the Sandusky Kin Hunters and the Wood County Chapter of the Ohio Genealogical Society. At these meetings I was invited to present my research topic and answer any questions members might have regarding my study. Volunteers were asked to provide contact information if they were willing to be interviewed. I also provided the President of the Kin Hunters with information regarding my study to be placed in the society's monthly newsletter, which reaches over 200 members.

⁷ On September 15, 2007 and October 20, 2007 I attended genealogy workshops at the Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Library, led by Becky Hill. These workshops were free and open to the public. Ms. Hill invited me to introduce my research project to the other workshop participants, and I was able to collect the contact information of women who were interested in being interviewed.

Library, located in Fremont, Ohio, is one of the foremost genealogy resource centers in the state. In total I obtained 23 names, with one woman later declining to be interviewed due to her schedule and an upcoming out-of-state relocation.

Interview Questions and Procedure

In my development of interview questions (see Appendix A), I followed the principles put forth in grounded theory. Many of the questions are open-ended, which allowed the participant to elaborate on their answers, using their own words and/or voice. Examples of these types of questions include length of time and methods utilized to conduct genealogical research, motivation for conducting genealogical research, and details surrounding genealogical community membership.

While I did have specific research questions I sought to address, such as what motivation do women have in documenting their family lineage, and what types of injustices (historically or current) do women encounter throughout their genealogical research, and how they seek to overcome these injustices, I intentionally designed the interview questions to be very broad in language and concept. This allowed me to shift my focus as the data emerged, forming and building theories that worked with the data, rather than against it. In the previous chapter I examined particular theories as they related to this project. I did not enter the project being tied to any one

particular theory, but instead allowed the data to guide me in selecting existing literature that worked to better understand the research surrounding family communication and feminist theory as a framework for this study. Following Strauss and Corbin's (1998) call, I began with an area of study rather than a preconceived theory in mind.

Once interviews were scheduled they were held in one-hour blocks of time. With the participant's permission, interviews were audio recorded, and subsequently transcribed. Interviews were conducted in a location of the participant's choosing, and included: the Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Library, a public library, a local courthouse, the participant's home, and local restaurants. The differences in these locations were vast, and often contributed to the comfort level of both the participant and myself. Restaurants were the most challenging, due to the noise and activity level. This would occasionally be an issue at the courthouse as well, since interviews held there were conducted in an open-seating atrium, which offered a lot of foot traffic. Conducting the interviews at a participant's home seemed to offer them a sense of comfort in their surroundings, but often left me feeling like I was intruding into their lives. Home interviews did have the benefit of being able to see photos and documents the woman held in her genealogy collection without requiring her to bring them to a separate interview location. The majority of interviews were conducted in a library environment, which seemed to work well for everyone

involved. Participants were relaxed and willing to talk freely about their genealogy findings, often showing me where in that particular library they conducted their research or had found something of value. This setting was generally quiet, with little activity, allowing the participant and I to focus on our conversation without disruptions. Quieter settings were also a benefit in the transcription process following the interviews.

Data Coding

Once the interviews and transcription were completed, I coded and analyzed the data, using the methods put forth by Dey (1999). Dey identifies four steps in the process of data coding and analysis. These steps include generating categories through coding observations, developing analytic and sensitizing categories, identifying property categories, and forming integrative hypotheses regarding category connections.

Data coding is conducted in three phases. The first phase is open coding where the data is examined for common themes. These themes are named and categorized by the researcher. The second phase is axial coding where the data is put back together (following open coding) to see the connections and relationships that lie within. The third and final phase of coding is selective coding. Selective coding involves selection of the core category, seeing how it works with other categories,

validating those relationships, and further investigating other categories that need more development (Dey, 1999).

Ultimately my data coding revealed two major themes. The first of these was the many positions the participants described themselves as holding. These positions were further broken down into two areas: positioning within the family and positioning within the genealogy community in which they were active. I also included participant comments related to the socio-historical positioning of women in this theme as well. The second theme I found that became apparent through data coding was family connections. In this I included data surrounding comments about genealogy's role in family reunification, as well as those that spoke to the role of genealogy in either strengthening or weakening familial relationships. Turning towards the axial coding phase, I looked at the interconnectedness of these two themes and came to understand how, together, they were useful in illustrating the multiple roles of women engaged in genealogy research. As the majority of participant responses could be seen as directly or indirectly relating back to the positioning of women in a variety of situations, I selected the positioning of women as my core category.

Data Analysis

Category Development

Once data coding was complete I began analyzing the data utilizing the process presented by Dey (1999). This process focuses on developing categories that are analytic and sensitizing rather than representational. Analytic categories are not labels, going beyond mere representation. Instead they involve conceptualization of key features of the data. Sensitizing categories should help the reader understand the full scope, being able to vividly imagine the people and area under study. To develop these different categories I examined the data within each theme discussed above. I further separated each theme into multiple areas, and arrived at seven unique categories (see Table 1, p. 63).

The first of these categories looks at participants' motivation to conduct family genealogy research, and contains information speaking to the (perceived) difference between "the story" and "the data," as they relate to family identity. The second analytic category examines the desire to connect with one's ancestors. This category works to examine the difference between *Knowing* and *knowing* one's ancestors, including the desire to K/know for oneself versus for others, and the spiritual/religious connection between family genealogy researcher and her ancestors. Closely related to connecting with one's ancestors, the third category looks at the effect genealogy research has upon family bonds. This category includes

information regarding the role family genealogy research plays in strengthening or weakening familial relationships, particularly among extended family members. The fourth category investigates the role of family legend within family genealogy by looking at race, class, and fame via family genealogy. Included in this category are discussions surrounding feelings of shame or pride about one's heritage/ancestry.

The fifth analytic category is the socio-historical positioning of women, which includes data regarding women's place within society as it pertains to genealogical information, such as land-ownership, voter registration, and census records. The sixth category that emerged from the participant narratives is the role of women within family systems. This category examines information regarding women's (perceived) responsibility to provide care to the family, the desire and/or obligation felt to provide such care, individual versus family identity, and the roles of men in the family (as perceived by women). The seventh, and final, category looks at the role of women within genealogy communities, and includes participants' discussions surrounding expert versus novice status, issues of authority, paid labor versus volunteer labor, community obligations versus family obligations, and concerns for personal safety.

Table 1

Data Categories

Analytic Categories	Sensitizing Data
Participants' motivation to conduct family genealogy research	Contains information speaking to the (perceived) difference between "the story" and "the data," as they relate to family identity.
K/knowing one's ancestors	Examines the difference between <i>Knowing</i> and <i>knowing</i> one's ancestors, including the desire to K/know for oneself versus for others, and the spiritual/religious connection between family genealogy researcher and her ancestors.
The effect on family bonds	Includes the role family genealogy research plays in strengthening or weakening familial relationships, particularly among extended family.
Tracing race, class, and fame via family genealogy	Contains discussions of instances where heritage/ancestry is viewed with a sense of shame or a sense of pride.
The socio-historical positioning of women	Includes data regarding women's place within society as it pertains to genealogical information, such as land-ownership, voter registration, and census records.
The role of women in family systems	Includes women's (perceived) responsibility to provide care to the family, the desire and/or obligation felt to provide such care, individual versus family identity, and the roles of men in the family (as perceived by women).
The role of women in genealogy communities	Includes participants' discussions surrounding expert versus novice status, issues of authority, paid labor versus volunteer labor, community obligations versus family obligations, and concerns for personal safety.

Category Properties

The next phase of data analysis seeks to identify the properties of the categories. Levels of abstraction among these properties will vary and will remain in constant flux, as the data is uncovered (Dey, 1999). The categories listed above are extremely fluid, which allowed for the data to be examined from the perspective of multiple categories. In other words, many of the participant responses had no “right” category, but instead were considered part of an ongoing conversation depicting each woman’s perspective.

Connections Between Categories

The final phase in data analysis is to develop integrative hypotheses about the relations between categories and their properties. In this step researchers begin to piece the puzzle back together, by drawing upon the links and connections between the different categories and their properties (Dey, 1999). I believe the fluidity between the seven categories makes this step the most challenging. The ebb and flow of each category, combined with the similarities and differences present in each woman’s story creates an overwhelming amount of connections between the categories and their respective properties. The challenge, I feel, is to narrow these possibilities down enough to focus on the hypotheses that most directly reflect the original research questions. To that end I revisited my original core category, the

positioning of women, as each category works both independently and simultaneously towards an understanding of women's positionality within the family, the community, and inevitably, society.

Grounded theory offers researchers a tool to examine multi-faceted situations or accounts (Charmaz, 2006). I selected it as the method for data analysis in this study because, as stated by Clarke (2007), grounded theory is always already implicitly feminist. Clarke bases this determination on several factors:

- 1) Its roots in American symbolic interactionist sociology and pragmatist philosophy emphasize actual experiences and practices – the lived doingness of social life.
- 2) Its use of Mead's concept of perspective that emphasizes partiality, situatedness, and multiplicity.
- 3) Its assumption of a materialist social constructionism.
- 4) Its foregrounding deconstructive analysis and multiple, simultaneous readings.
- 5) Its attention to a range of variation as featuring of difference(s) (p. 347).

In utilizing grounded theory I sought to answer Clarke's call to "question the very grounds of traditional disciplinary categories and conventions and open up possible new avenues for enhancing social justice" (p. 361). As women and genealogy are both under-researched, this study illuminates the ways in which women (amateur)

genealogists experience social injustices within their role as family historian, as well as the ways they work toward using family communication as a tool for correcting these injustices. Empowering the participants to use their own voice to speak about their experiences with family genealogy and genealogy communities resulted in data that is vivid in description and rich with meaning.

CHAPTER IV:
CHASING/TRACING THE FAMILY TREE

As the genealogical data moves within/throughout the family, identities are shaped and solidified. Additionally, an opportunity to re-present, or re-package, the data is possible. That is to say that in reframing particular events or stories, new meaning may be ascribed to them, causing a shift in the family identity (Trujillo, 2002). With each repetition the story is both retold and reconceived, gaining and losing significance from both the giver and the receiver.

This study examines the impact of genealogy on family communication, as well as the positioning of women both within the family and within genealogy communities. As primary caregivers for the family, women often carry the responsibility to maintain the family identity (Barker, 2005). One way the participants of this study have chosen to develop and negotiate that identity is through family genealogy research. In conducting this research, participants are able to retrieve the information and pass it forward to other family members.

In this chapter I will discuss my findings with regard to participants motivation to conduct family genealogy research and the impact that data has upon the family. To accomplish this I will focus the discussion around the first four analytic categories presented in Table One (p. 63). As both critical ethnography and

grounded theory are *messy* methodologies, the categorical division of the data in this study is fluid and elastic. When these categories are examined simultaneously the connections between them become more evident, thus making them useful in understanding how family stories and identities are constructed and maintained.

Participants' Motivation to Conduct Family Research

The ability to cultivate an identity that envelops both the past and present family is a strong motivator for amateur genealogists. To best answer my first research question, what motivation do women have in documenting their family lineage, I examined the category of participant motivation. What is evident in this category is that the participants are interested in finding both the facts and the story of their family.

The Facts and the Story

For some, motivation can be simple. As Amy, a woman just beginning her genealogy quest, states, "I just want to know where I came from." This response came through in some version for each participant. The desire to know the origination of your family is a powerful one. What is of more interest to me is the viewpoint expressed by some participants, highlighting the difference between the family *facts* and the family *story*.

While the facts are an important part of family genealogy research, for many of the women I interviewed, it is the story that is most coveted. The names and dates are nice to have, they say, but it is the descriptions that make the facts come to life.

Sue: Just the thrill of finding out the different members of my family, and where they lived, and how they lived [provides motivation]. It's addictive. It is very addictive. You just, you just don't want to do your housework.

For some, like Sally, who has been conducting genealogy research with her sister-in-law for the past 6 months, knowing more about previous generations can often provide a link to individual personality traits.

Sally: So it's just [knowing] what makes me, I guess, for my own self. I don't know exactly [sister's] motivation, but for my own self, it's kinda like all a part of me. What made me, helped to make me who I am? Who are all these people who influenced my life? Or who was the black sheep, really? And I want to know. My dad and his brother are a couple of characters and practical jokers, but yet I don't think ever troublemakers. Hardworking. Farmers forever. And, you know, who works harder than the farmers. Farmers forever. And I think that's partially my own self, why I'm a huge gardener, you know, that influence from my grandparents.

Although some view the facts as being separate from the story, others see the interconnectedness between the two. It is the story that gives meaning and depth to

the facts. When I asked Lolita why she has conducted genealogy research for the last 32 years, she expressed a desire to know the people behind the stories. While both work to sustain the family identity, neither the story nor the facts are the quite the same without each other, as evidenced by Lolita and Jackie's, another genealogist with over 30 years experience, responses.

Lolita: The people. They are people. They're human beings. And I am forever wanting to get past the dates people want to put on databases and find the people. I write a column, I have for 11 years now, for the clan [name], four times a year, and it's strictly genealogy updates, but it's trying to find those little stories.

Jackie: At Ellis Island a lot of things were burned. And if they came over between then [the time period for which there are no records] I'll never find out. And I can't find out what ship they came on. Now I have stories from my grandmother of her mother that came over on the ship, and how they hid her brother in an empty pickle barrel because they didn't have the money. And things like that. But she didn't know what ship, or anything. And I'm having a hard time finding it, but boy when I do, I'll sure be excited!

The interest in story versus fact was one that was often attributed to gender.

Much like a comment made by Roxanne, a newer genealogist, regarding her husband

being ill equipped to find (or imagine) the story behind particular family data, men were often portrayed as being uninterested in family narratives.

Terry: But when you do meet a guy he's always very focused and he just likes tearing through the stuff.

Terry, representing widely-held beliefs that men and women function differently in the world (Bing, 2004; Crawford, 1995), says that in her 7 years conducting genealogy research she has seen men work quickly through the facts of a family, while women are more invested in the individual and collective stories that may be unearthed. This investment in the stories both motivates and assists women genealogists in their quest to find female ancestors.

Following Fisher's (1984, 1987) argument that all humans are, by nature, storytellers, it makes sense that the participants are seeking the stories that bring the genealogical data to life. In many instances the data is merely the starting point, telling the genealogist where to look for the story. In other cases, the data becomes the frame, holding the stories together. As these stories often emerge in pieces, begging to be put back together, it is up to the individual genealogist to reconstruct the meaning behind them. It is her job to maintain the coherence and fidelity of the stories, often relying on fragments and educated guesses to solve the puzzle (Jorgenson & Bochner, 2004).

K/knowing One's Ancestors

As these stories become more accessible, the participants use them to understand and connect with their ancestors. Many of them spoke about the ways they identified with their ancestors, which I came to label as either *Knowing* or *knowing*. To Know an ancestor is to feel a spiritual connection with them, to feel as if one has a deep understanding of that person in some way. This Knowing can occur with ancestors long passed, or with those relations with whom you were acquainted before their death. In contrast, to be in contact with living family members, to have access to them and their stories, is to know them.

K/knowing happens for a variety of reasons. Some participants desire to know older generations to be able to gain and then pass family stories, legends, and wisdom on to younger/future generations.

Kim: I like to know who I'm related to. I guess that's curiosity. It's just important to me. I sit around, I remember being a child listening to my family tell stories about this, this, and this. I love history. And that's what I'm thinking. And I would like my kids [to know the older relatives]. It's nice because my daughter, she was the youngest one at the funeral, knew Great-Aunt [name]. Which would have been her great-great-aunt. So to know that many generations, I think it's important.

While knowing is often described as gaining something from the older family member, such as access to family data, Knowing offers a deeper connection to those no longer living. This connection provides a link between past and present that provides a sense of comfort and insight into who the ancestor was.

Barbara: When I hear my dad talk about my grandmother, she died when he was 5 - my middle name is her name, I feel like I know her. But he barely has a recollection.

Barbara, a family genealogist for over 30 years, feels a connection, an ability to Know her grandmother, even though they have never met. Barbara draws this connection, in part, from a shared middle name. For others, like Betty, another 30-year genealogy veteran, the connection is seen in certain personality or physical characteristics.

Betty: I would like to know what makes people who they are. Not what they do. But you know there's DNA for cleft palates and crossed-eyes. But there are traits in people, I'm sure, that are passed down. Because those are the kinds of things that I see. Like my son had a heart attack when he was 40 and it made me go back and look at how young some people died, what of, and all that stuff. But it's the traits. I have located a line of angry people. Angry unhappy people. And that fascinates me.

In understanding the personality traits of her ancestors', Betty is able to construct her own identity. She is able to draw connections between their actions and beliefs and

her own. The K/knowledge she has of her family shapes not only her interactions with them, but also her own standpoint. Others, such as Dorothy, a genealogist for 6 years, seek to gain an understanding into how her ancestors' survived during particular time periods, creating an identity of survivorship.

Dorothy: I don't know. [I] Just almost feel like you have a kinship with somebody that lived so long [ago]. How did they make it? How did they live? I think all the time, I do the obituary list up here [society office], [on the] Internet, and way back in the 1800s people were living to be 100 and they couldn't run to the drugstore all the time. How did they do it? How did they survive? And it feels, when you read this stuff, it gives you some kind of understanding. A little bit.

While these connections are often described as spiritual, for some they may be motivated by religious beliefs as well. This is evidenced in Jane's response,

Family to me is very important. And not just the family we have around us today, but the family past. Those people are family too, to me. And they're important to me as family members. I just think that if I would sit down and talk with them we would have the best time. And to me they're just an important part of my life. Even though I never met them, but they're a part of me somehow. And I guess it's a way to honor their memory. And also to me, it's really important, because I'm a Catholic, and I feel like I need to pray for

those people, you know, back, way back then. That's important to me to honor them and to help them. I feel like I want to know who they are so that I can pray for them. So that's another thing that motivates me.

Regardless of the desire to K/know previous generations, it is clear in talking with the participants that these connections are important to them. In many cases it is these connections that help them to shape and negotiate their own stories and identities, both individually and as a family.

Not all family stories are pretty. Some reveal painful secrets, memories best left buried in the family closet. Sometimes, however, it is in the unveiling of these memories that healing can occur (Poulos, 2006). When these stories are understood within particular contexts and family systems, it will become easier to understand the impact they have upon the family identity. This is true of all family stories, regardless of their desirability. Family tensions are often created around family memories. Different family members often contest accuracy, with each person presenting a different version of what "really" happened. In these situations it is important to remember that the factualness of the memory is secondary to the function it serves (Denzin, 2003).

Even the "prettiest" family stories are often messy. Family genealogists are motivated to find the stories so that they can understand how they are situated in the family, to know where and from whom they come. These stories, combined with the

genealogical data, rarely come to them in a complete form, however. Rather, like Goodall (2005, 2006) predicts, they engage in the ritual of narrative inheritance. Several participants discussed this ritual, reflecting on how they became engaged in the act of genealogy research, as well as their plans for passing the family data on to future generations. While they seek to offer the future generations a completed story, this is not always possible. It becomes their hope, then, that someone will continue the search, feeling compelled to complete the narrative, to close the story for generations to come.

Once discovered, these family narratives are shared widely amongst family members, and with each repetition they are reconfigured to reflect the values and beliefs of the narrator (Trujillo, 2004). It is in this space of retelling that women have the opportunity to contextualize historical events, to reflect on their own position within the family structure, and to assign that position value.

Impact of Genealogy on Family Communication

The sharing of genealogical data influences family communication in particular ways. To best answer my second research question, what impact does the genealogical data have on family communication, I asked participants to tell me about their experiences sharing their family genealogy research with family members. Similar to family systems theory (Yerby, et al., 1995), family network

theory examines family member interactions, working to understand how they exchange information and resources (Galvin & Brommel, 1996), such as genealogy data. The influence of family genealogy, according to study participants, is usually positive, in that it creates new bonds, or strengthens existing ones, with family members. It is possible, however, for genealogical data to also negatively impact family communication by causing tension between family members over the act of genealogy research and/or the data that is discovered, causing bonds to become weakened or corroded.

Strengthening the Family Bond

When asked about how genealogy data was exchanged within the family network, the majority of participants' reported positive interactions, often citing instances where their discussion of genealogy was working towards bringing family members closer together.

Naomi: I think it's going to [bring us closer]. It's already started. I've talked to cousins I haven't talked to since I was a kid. You know, my one cousin, I haven't talked to her since I was a kid. I mean probably at my grandmother's funeral when I was 9 was the last time I saw her. And she's out in the middle of the country and her sister's in California. So I think we're going to start talking more, and we've already started. Thank goodness for email.

Participants' often discussed an increased level of communication with extended family members, similar to Naomi's statement above. For some, however, the bonds among immediate family members may also be strengthened. Rebecca, a genealogist with 37 years experience, points this out when she reflects on how her exchange of genealogy data at family reunions strengthens her relationship with her mother, while also increasing communication among extended family members.

Rebecca: Frequently [discussing genealogy data] with my mother, sporadically with my kids. If there's a family reunion I might have a flurry of emails flying around and calls to get ready for a family reunion. And then after a family reunion, sharing stuff that we had talked about. So with my mother being 89 and still sharp, but thinking she's going to keel over any day, we've got to do this before [she dies]. We've got to do this. So we've been going to some family reunions that we don't normally go to, different sides of the family. And doing that I get prepped before I go, and then we all enjoy each other, and then we send things afterwards. And then she [mother] has 50 new friends that she emails all the time.

Weakening the Family Bond

Although most participants reported an increase in family bonding over genealogy data, a few did discuss the negative impact that may be felt by family

members. This impact may be felt in multiple ways, depending on the situation.

Lolita speaks about the feelings of frustration she had surrounding difficulty getting extended family members to provide on-going genealogical information for the family newsletter.

Lolita: I did it [family newsletter] for 8 years, so this was basically once a year.

The first half of it would be bringing them up to date on births, deaths, new grandchildren, and so on. I think one of the [reasons] I closed it off [was] because trying to get the information out of the living people is so hard. And when you hear back that a first cousin says, well you didn't put our new grandchild in the [newsletter], I've had it! I was ready to quit anyway.

Nobody let me know [their updates].

While Lolita points out the frustration that may be felt by the family genealogist, it is important to note that the act of conducting genealogy research may also result in discord between family members and family genealogist.

Gayle: Back when I used to work with my Aunt [name], doing her side of the family, my mother and aunt don't get along at all. And so, I never could mention anything to my mother about working on anything with my aunt. But once she knew that my aunt and I no longer worked together then she started giving me stuff, my mother did, about my dad's side of the family.

That she had learned from my dad's grandmother. So it used to be a touchy thing.

Many feel that despite the possibility that genealogy data may place family relationship in jeopardy, the possibility for connection and bonding are worth the risks.

Alyce: And I have the time to reconnect with the family. It [genealogy] has proven to be one of the best connections because that's something that we share. It's not like bragging about your accomplishments, it's about sharing what you have in common.

The concept of a common family identity plays a large role in determining the impact of genealogical data on family communication. Participants often spoke about their perceptions of their families as either close-knit or distant. In some instances they referred to the entire (extended) family using these terms, while other responses focused on particular relationships they had with certain family members.

Participants who reported having sporadic communication with extended family members discussed how they are able to use their genealogy research as a way to connect with those family members. The genealogy information serves as a way to bridge the gap, a starting point for conversation. Participants who identified their family as being close-knit reported similar instances of genealogical data bringing the family closer together, particular when the researcher collaborating with other family

members in the act of researching. However, participants' from close-knit families also discussed a higher risk of negative communication if they violated the expectations of their family if the data they found cast the family in a negative light.

Tracing Race, Class, and Fame via Family Genealogy

Sharing the genealogy information that family members hold in common sometimes leads to surprising findings. Sooner or later, almost everyone conducting genealogy research runs into a piece of information about which they were previously unaware. For some this information will confirm family claims of fame, wealth, or royalty. For others the new data may be seen as a "skeleton in the closet," leaving genealogists to decide if, when, and how to best introduce this information to her family.

One of the most common "surprises" uncovered in family genealogy research deals with racial/ethnic heritage. As particular populations have endured a long history of oppression and discrimination it is no surprise that families sometimes tried to contain or minimize connections to ancestors within those marginalized populations.

Gayle: My dad said, well didn't you know you're great-grandmother was an Indian? Why do you think we used to call her Black Grammy? Because she was very, very dark-skinned. But we called her Black Grammy because at the

time I had three grandmothers named [name]. And you couldn't say Grammy [name], Grammy [name], or Grammy [name]. So, we called her Black Grammy because she was dark skinned. And I said I never knew that. And that's when my dad said yes, your grandmother's mother was a full-blooded Indian but she was adopted...

Although Gayle, a genealogist for 11 years, did not discuss how this news affected her, it is easy to imagine the ways such information might cause someone to reconsider and reconstruct her identity. This is especially true given the socio-political oppressions particular racial/ethnic groups, such as Native Americans, experience. While this information comes as a shock to some, others believe it is important to confirm suspicions about racial/ethnic heritage, whether to satisfy personal curiosity or to understand potential medical conditions/risks predominate among different populations. One way to accomplish this, as discussed by Kim, who has been conducting her family genealogy research for 3 years, is through DNA testing.

Kim: I've heard of people accepting that [being upset upon learning about racial heritage]. You know it even tells you, like the DNA [tests]. My husband, we're doing DNA for his, definitely. And it says right there [on the test] if you are worried about this, this, and this then you probably shouldn't do this because you may find something you don't want to find out... My husband

has some really neat traits. The eye doctor said that there's something genetic with his eyes that pertains mostly to African-Americans. Well he's got that. If you look at my husband's father, he looks bi-racial. And they lived in Louisiana and Mississippi, the family [ancestors] heritage. He could either be African-American or Indian, we're not sure. He wants to find out.

Unveiling branches of the family tree that have yet to be discovered is extremely rewarding for family genealogists. Experts do caution, however, that one should be prepared for these surprise findings, particularly if they will be viewed in a negative light within the family (Rising, 2005).

Issues of race/ethnicity are not the only place surprises may emerge.

Genealogical data may corroborate or invalidate previous claims regarding family wealth, or as Roxanne discusses, lack thereof:

Roxanne: I did tell him [husband], because at the Hayes Center somebody has already done the [name], a different connection, but part of his [family line] is in there. There's a book. And [the book] had in [the ancestors] wills, they found stock. And [husband's] mom had been telling him that someone in the family was poor, didn't have anything. And here when [that person] died they found that he had owned all this stock and it was worth a lot of money. [Husband] was thrilled about that.

The narratives that get passed along often document wealth or status, while genealogical facts that disprove such claims are abandoned for more exciting stories. While money is a marker of class that shapes identity, it is not the only one. Social standing can also be evidenced through familial or community connections. In the geographic region from where the respondents come many amateur genealogists are interested in linking their ancestors to President Rutherford B. Hayes, a one-time local resident.

Barbara: My father would tell me stories about his grandfather who would play cards with President Hayes at the courthouse. And apparently my grandfather would have a little libation, and so when it was time to go home, his horse and buggy would take him home, would be back to the Woodville area, which is where the farm was. Which is all, it's all been chronicled, because it's all in the... So I heard this little story. And then of course when I'm doing the research and I started out with that name and I specifically went to the Hayes [Library] because I knew from the past, when I re-entering this starting again, doing more, I remembered that there are articles there about my great-grandfather being involved in politics in Sandusky County. So it's all chronicled that he... so I have no doubt in my mind that this probably happened. I'm sure it wasn't written up.

Other participants' were interested in proving or disproving a family story, simply out of curiosity and interest. While Naomi, a new genealogist, is not tied to the outcome either way, she would like to know if there is validity to the family story tying her to early American revolutionary Ethan Allen.

Naomi: And she and I both discussed the fact that our dads both said that we were related to Ethan Allen. And we're going okay is this something that someone along the way said wouldn't it be nice if we were, and it got taken as yes, we are. But both our father's think we're related to Ethan Allen. So I want to find out if it's true.

Notoriety, while often tied closely to fame, is sometimes exhibited in the family stories that get told.

Barb: His [husband] mother, she's funny; she likes to know all the gore. She gets really tickled if somebody shot somebody back in the... Most people like to hide that. It gets a tickle out of her. I went back two total generations at one time. I was so thrilled. I came back and I was showing her this and this. And she says what's that, and I said well this is way back on the [name] side, the one son was an alcoholic, and his sister was a divorced, or a widow. He chased her out on the porch roof and shot her. Because she wouldn't give him any money. And she was so thrilled, she was just thrilled.

It is interesting to note that not only does Barb's mother-in-law get tickled by the gory stories of ancestors' past, but Barb, who has been conducting genealogy research with her sister for 10 years, also derives pleasure in telling this story. It will likely survive as one of the narratives passed down to future generations, used to describe her mother-in-law's quirks. And while Barb's portrayal of her mother-in-law as someone who enjoys hearing the gore is entertaining, it also helps to understand how particular stories function to create and maintain family identities. Barb's mother-in-law may see these types of stories as adding interest to their family history, demonstrating their unique family identity.

Understanding the impact, both positive and negative, genealogical data has upon family communication and family identity gives women the ability to see the roles they fulfill within the family, and to add value to those roles. By focusing on women's standpoints, roles, and contributions, these women are better able to see the contributions they make to family systems and networks. The contributions are important to understand because they allow women to recognize the roles they play within family systems and the contributions they make to other organizational structures.

CHAPTER V:
ONE BIG HAPPY FAMILY

An understanding of family communication is necessary when examining the family structure, but also when studying organizations outside of the family, as it often lays the foundation for other social interactions and behaviors. Just as societal values often bleed into family life, the rules and expectations held by family networks can also be seen in social organizations (Bruner, 1990; Schmeckle & Sprecher, 2004). In this chapter I will discuss and contrast the positioning of women within the family and within genealogy communities. These roles women play in different types of structures are worthy of study, particularly within genealogical communities which are comprised largely of women. The participation of women, in larger numbers than men, results in traditional, or patriarchal, infrastructures being populated, organized, and led by women.⁸ As women continue to suffer socio-

⁸ Traditional, or patriarchal, communities are identified by their governing structure.

Executive boards lead these communities, usually containing positions such as President, Vice President, and Treasurer. Power is distributed unevenly throughout the community, favoring executive board members. Tasks may be delegated to ad

political oppression by patriarchal systems of power, it is useful to understand how women are working within these types of traditionally organized societies and to explore genealogy communities as possible sites for resistance to patriarchal oppression. First, however, it is useful to understand how women have historically been positioned within society, as well as the roles women play within the family.

Injustices in Genealogical Research

Understanding how women, past and present, are oppressed within a patriarchal culture is crucial to working towards correcting the injustices, or reframing the story with new values and meaning. Both the socio-historical positioning of women category and the role of women in family systems category work to answer the third research question guiding this study: what types of injustices (historically or current) do the women encounter throughout their genealogical research, and how do they seek to overcome these injustices? As each participant reflects upon her own standpoint they can begin to create spaces for resistance to political and cultural oppression.

hoc committees, at which time committee members will experience a gain in organizational power and/or authority as well.

In the interviews I asked each participant to identify any areas of difficulty they noticed when researching female ancestors. Their responses were not unexpected, primarily focusing on marital name changes and a lack of recorded data due to societal regulations prohibiting women to own land or register to vote. Participants also discussed the invisibility of women's stories throughout history, making it hard to imagine what life was like for their ancestors. In an effort to break this cycle of silencing women, several participants recounted ways that they are working to ensure future generations will have access to family stories. In large part these strategies involved the recording of their own lives, in one or more formats, such as diaries, journals, scrapbooks, and web blogs. Some women discussed how they felt their own tenacity was the key factor in overcoming the historical marginalization of women. That is to say through their insistence in tracing their female ancestors, they are able to shed light on the lives of women, from a historical perspective.

The Socio-Historical Positioning of Women

Women's historic positioning within society, particularly in dominant American culture(s), is one of large-scale marginalization (Rosenberg, 2002). This is especially true when looking at the role(s) of women within the family (Mackinnon, 2006). Progress towards equality with regard to women's rights, while forward moving, has been slow. This socio-historical marginalization of women has had a

tremendous impact on family genealogy research. As genealogical data comes largely from written records and recorded documents, women are often missing from the equation. Historically, women are missing from several legal aspects of society; prior to 1840 women could not own land in her own name, prior to 1850 women were excluded from the U.S. Census, and prior to 1920 women were not allowed to vote. In instances where it may be possible to find a female ancestor within genealogical data it remains a challenge to follow her lineage in its entirety due to the societal tradition of taking the husband's name upon marriage. The ramifications of marital name changes can be seen throughout genealogy research. In this tradition women are expected to legally adopt the surname of their husband, in addition to be referred to, socially, by his first name.⁹ This change can result in an identity shift for the woman; she is no longer herself, but rather is viewed only in relation to her spouse.

⁹ Although the practice of referring to a woman using her husband's first name has faded, especially in the U.S., the expectation that women will adopt the surname of her spouse is still present in most instances.

Marital name changes.

These challenges in tracing women's genealogy are reflected in many of the participant interviews I conducted. Rebecca talks specifically about the tradition of referring to a woman by her husband's name only, such as Mrs. John Jones rather than Mrs. Susan Jones.

Rebecca: There's plenty [of challenges in tracing female ancestors]. Just the habit of calling her Mrs. John Smith. There's obituaries, hundreds, thousands, I mean the index over [at the Hayes Library], there's tens of thousands of obituaries where you cannot find women's names. They've got the kids listed, they've got the husband listed, but they don't have her first name in it. So the challenge of being linked to your husband with no name is one of the really nasty things.

Similarly addressing the issue of maiden/marital names, Barbara speaks to the frustration she feels, both at the practice of marital name changes and at her own complicity in the system, when seeking female ancestors.

Barbara: For me, the hardest thing is that it's easier for me to trace the men than it is the women. And to keep that straight in my head. Okay, this is her maiden name, this is her married name.

While women's socio-historical positioning often renders them invisible within the genealogical data, there are tips and techniques for finding them recommended by genealogy experts.

Overcoming invisibility.

Both Carmack (1998) and Schaefer (1999) discuss the obstacles that may be present when tracking female ancestors in their respective genealogy how-to guides. They encourage genealogy researchers to examine alternate sources of data, such as journals, city directories, church records, and newspapers when seeking information about female relatives. Schaefer details the rights of women in civil and common law for each state from the 19th century to present so that readers might better understand where to look and how to read particular documents, such as land sale and marital records. Furthermore, Carmack suggests readers research, and subsequently document, the social history of women throughout specific time periods when analyzing their genealogical data. Some of the topics she raises include sexuality, childbearing, women's work, and the moral reform movement.

As Carmack (1998) points out, many stories belonging to women, either individual or collective, are left out of historical works. These stories are most often lost or, wither away over time, the women reduced to names on a family tree, if they can be found at all. One method for combating this erasure is to publicize existing

autobiographical data left behind by our female ancestors. These works can take the shape of diaries, poetry, or verbal narratives passed along from generation to generation. Equally important to publicizing these historical works is making sure this type of erasure does not happen to current and future generations. Several participants spoke about measures they are taking to record their own lives. Jane, a genealogist with 10 years experience, explains,

Jane: And one of my primary reasons of keeping a journal is it's something that I can hand down to future generations of what my thoughts were, what's going on in my life at the time. I wish I had that for my grandmother or my great-grandmother. I wish I had that to read of what they were thinking, their thoughts.

By recording her thoughts and feelings about current events and life circumstances, Jane is ensuring that future generations will better understand her as an individual. For some, the socio-historical marginalization of women may provide the motivation they need to keep tracking their female ancestors. Terry speaks to this when she says,

But as far as looking for female ancestors nobody seems to care. And that really irritates me to no end. They're like, we're just going to do the male side because that's, it's so much easier, right? You just keep the same name, you keep looking in the census and there you are. Whereas I think it's more challenging to look up the women.

The challenge in finding female ancestors can make the data, when found, much more rewarding, especially when it helps to piece together more information about the role(s) each woman played within the family.

Women's Role in the Family

Women play many roles with the family structure. They are mothers, grandmothers, aunts, daughters, nieces, and cousins. They may also be the primary caregiver, the primary financial provider, or some combination thereof. Family roles consist of a set of prescribed behaviors that individuals perform in relation to other family members (Yerby, et al., 1995).

Desire versus obligation to provide family care.

One such behavior that came up multiple times in participant interviews, as evidenced by Roxanne, a newer genealogist, and Sue's, a genealogist with 20 years experience, comments, was a responsibility to research and record the family genealogy data for younger/future generations.

Roxanne: I'm really doing it for my daughter. She's 24. I know she doesn't care about it now, but she will. So, just to do everything for her. Because after my mom's gone then a lot of that stuff will be gone.

Sue: For my children. For my children so they will have that. Although they have no interest in it right now... I think it would be very nice for them to have this information on their family, and their father's family.

As evidenced in the responses provided by Roxanne and Sue, the responsibility to provide family data to subsequent generations is often an internal obligation felt by the participant, rather than being externally imposed by family members.

A second common recurrence in participant interviews was a desire to research genealogical data for a spouse or partner. Participants with children would often say this desire was a part of providing the family genealogy data to their children, wanting to give them both sides of the "tree." However, some participants reported that they research this data because of the interest expressed by their partner.

Nicole: My husband's actual, my mother in law's side, is Amish. And she actually did do some of it [genealogy], but she hit a roadblock and she couldn't find any more out. But now-a-days they've got so much more out there then they had 10 years ago when she started it. So I'm hoping that I can find out. Because my husband does want to know more. So I'm kinda hoping to find out more for him.

The desire to research family genealogy for one's marital partner, either for the partner's interest or for the children of that union, are one example of the interdependence characteristic present in family systems theory (Littlejohn, 1999).

Many women also noted that their *interest* in genealogy often preceded the *doing* of genealogy by many years due to family obligations. This was particularly true for women with children, who often discussed an inability to dedicate much free time to data collection while they were raising and tending to their families. The commitment to family care is also reflected in participant responses regarding the desire to research genealogy data so that their children and/or spouse would have it. With that in mind, this genealogy research may be seen as another example of how women attend to the family needs.

Participants also spoke about their insistence that family members recognize their contribution to the (immediate) family with regard to their genealogical research. This can be seen in participant responses to the question, "with whom do you share your findings?" Participants often said they shared their findings with both their spouse and their children, regardless of that person's interest in the data. By placing value upon this data, and their time and effort recovering the information, participants are also demanding that their family members recognize and respect their efforts.

Individual and family identity.

Family systems focus on relationships between family members, relying on a system of balance to maintain homeostasis (Yerby, et al., 1995). The relationship between marital partners is reflected in the responses above; the time and energy devoted to genealogy research for one's spouse may be seen as a commitment to the family, or as a way to maintain family harmony. These participant responses also highlight the shared identity felt by the married participants. Although each woman is interested in collecting the data for her own family she also recognizes the bonds that she has with her partner and is therefore also willing to gather that information, as a way of building and maintaining a shared family identity. Jane discusses her views on this with regard to collecting her husband's data to pass on to their children.

Jane: Well, his, I guess {husband's} side. I talked to his mother, and then his father's mother. So both of those sides. I have done a little bit with just his direct [lines]. Because I'm doing that mainly for my children. I mean, frankly, I don't really care. But I'm doing that for them because that's part of their line. But I haven't gone very far back, just because I'm busy. I want to spend time on my family. And I figure he's got six other brothers and sisters and if they want to spend some time on their family they're welcome to it. But I want to at

least get back to great-great grandparents with his side for my children. And then if anybody else wants to do it they're welcome to it.

Men's role in the family.

Like women, men also play multiple roles within the family. Some participants addressed the role played by the men in their lives, with regard to genealogy.

Nicole: Like I said, I just think that even though men don't seem to be interested in it, they kinda look at you like you're stupid when they... I don't think they take us women seriously anyway. Like my father-in-law when we were asking him questions, he just kinda looked at me like, *whatever!*

While Nicole, a new genealogist, perceives a lack of interest from her father-in-law, Roxanne opines that her husband may be less qualified than she is to conduct family genealogy research. When I asked Roxanne what challenges she faced as a woman genealogist, she said

Roxanne: [There is] not really a challenge because I'm a woman. Actually sometimes I think women have more advantage in [genealogy]. Because they take care of the family and they can think about things. You know my husband would never think that so-and-so's wife died and then the parents took over and tried to raise the... He would never think of that. Unless it's

black and white. Where I would sit and try to make up a whole story to try and figure out how so-and-so didn't have this kid and then they have this kid living with them. And that would intrigue me, where I don't think it would a man like it would a woman. So, I think it's more of an advantage. But then [laughing] I think everything is an advantage.

While Roxanne offers a somewhat playful commentary about everything being to a woman's advantage, it is clear in other participant responses that a woman must be seen in relation to a man within many family systems. Many of the participants revisited the issues surrounding marital name change when discussing this, saying they were sure to identify themselves using both their maiden and married last names. This, they felt, was particularly important when corresponding with extended family members, as it allowed those members to better understand how the woman was connected to the family. One example of this can be seen in Lolita's statement,

That name is greater than anything when it's taken from a man's point of view. And I make a point of, when I'm corresponding with [husband's family] that I use my maiden name in the middle so they know I'm not a single. But you run into that everyday in [society office], people that come in, particularly men, they're not all that way [focusing only on the name], but a lot are.

Lolita's perspective, that the name means more than anything to men, is one that continued to come up throughout participant interviews, especially in relation to the methods and procedures for genealogy data collection most prominent in genealogy communities.

The Role of Women in Genealogy Communities

To gain insight into the different roles women fill in genealogy communities I asked each participant if she was a member of any such community, and if so to discuss her experiences with the community she was most active in. Ten of the 22 participants are members of at least one genealogical society. Included in this group there are two women who currently serve as President for their society, one current Vice President (formerly President), and one former President. At least two of the ten participants reported they were founding members of their local genealogy communities as well. Although many of these women are members of multiple local genealogy communities (face-to-face), only one participant identified herself as a member of any virtual genealogy communities. It is also worth noting that she is a virtual community member exclusively, and does not participate in any face-to-face genealogy communities. The seventh, and final, analytic category (Table One, p. 63) that emerged from the data reflects the experiences of these women within their genealogy communities, and addresses the final research question of this study,

examining how membership in the genealogical community impacts the views of women regarding the importance of genealogical data collection.

Expert versus Novice Status

One of the questions I asked each participant was how long they had been conducting family genealogy research. For the ten participants' active in genealogy communities the responses ranged from 6 years to 37 years. These responses were often peppered with comments describing the length of time, usually identifying the time span as not very long, a long time, or too long. Participant feelings regarding the number of years they have spent researching family data often reflected comparisons to other community members. This can be seen in responses like Jackie's: "Since about '75, so how long is that... Not very long." While many people would consider 32 years to be a long time, Jackie understands it to be less time than some other members of her community, therefore she does not think of it as a long time.

Other participants framed their experiences in terms of being a novice or an expert in genealogical research. Alyce, a community President with 7 years of genealogy experience speaks to these concepts.

Alyce: When they first asked me to be president, and [other member] had asked, I said, I'm such a novice. I said, it would be stupid, and I really, I was involved in some other things, and I really don't have the time to give. And

she said well, I'll serve as President if you'll be Vice President and learn, so that's how that happened. But she's an excellent teacher.

Members who have been engaged in genealogical research for a number of years may eventually achieve expert status within their community. Rebecca, a community vice-president and former president, addresses this when reflecting on what benefits she receives from being a community member.

Rebecca: [Benefits include] networking, talking to people who are doing similar research. At this stage I'm more, I'm supporting them more than they're supporting me. I don't mean to be whatever, but...

While Rebecca enjoys the networking aspect of community membership she also recognizes that, after more than 30 years, she can provide more assistance to others than can be returned to her in most cases.

Authority

Authority may come with expertise. Within genealogical communities, authority is usually granted in one of two ways. The first of these is through positions of power and/or leadership. Community members who hold officer positions and sit on the executive board, are granted authority within that community. These officers then use that authority to govern and lead the society in ways that ultimately reflect the goals and mission of the community.

The second way authority is bestowed upon community members is when an individual is seen as the most, or one of the most, knowledgeable in a particular area of genealogy research. Many amateur genealogists have one or two areas of the research process that are of particular interest to them. Some of these specialized areas include cemetery research, gravestone repair, and photograph or document preservation. Those with authority status are often trusted to preserve the integrity of the data, even when it is not their own.

Gayle: I help a lot of people now that I'm in [community, as President]. So over the Internet I help people, and sometimes they'll call me and want me to meet them up at the Hayes Center, or they'll write and want me to go to a cemetery for them because they live too far away. I do a lot of that.

Authority status may also be granted to a genealogist who is especially knowledgeable about particular family lineages, particularly if they focus on common or difficult to trace names, such as Smith and Jones.

Volunteer Labor

As evidenced by Rebecca and Gayle's responses above, community members, regardless of status, are often engaged with helping others. In order to thrive, genealogy communities rely upon the generosity of members, often asking them to commit both time and money. Those responsible for maintaining the community,

like domestic and familial caregivers, are not usually (monetarily) compensated for their efforts.

Lolita: For [community] I spend at least twenty hours [per week, doing volunteer work]. But it isn't connected [to her family research]. A lot of that is helping other people. It's the newsletters; it's the organization to help people. It's a big business though. One of our fellows who used to help us back when we had our office over in the old jail, he said you know, it takes the work of a million dollar industry for a group this size. Just the mechanics of keeping up the memberships, and... It's so much more than a business.

Several participants reported that the time commitment, more so than the financial one, was both a blessing and a curse. Through acts of volunteerism, community members are sometimes able to enhance their own genealogy skills, while also giving back to a community they feel has benefited them.

Jackie: I'm learning how to do other things [within genealogy research]. But the part I like is I love to help out in the office. Like the [society board] meeting we had the other day. Because these ladies [on the society board], I just love them to death... But you do learn a lot of tips... Very informative. So I just enjoy all of it.

One concern shared by participants was that of membership recruitment and retention. When asked about the drawbacks of being part of a genealogical community Rebecca said,

Just getting asked to do work. Because we always need officers or committee people. I think a lot of people will drop out because they're interested and they like it, but they're always, every society, all these little societies, all need work...

As stated earlier by Lolita, a former president, genealogy communities require a large amount of upkeep. Participants' are worried that as the current membership body ages there will not be younger members willing to invest the time and energy needed.

Family versus Community Obligations

One reason for not joining a genealogy community stated by the 12 study participants who are not currently a part of one was the time commitment they felt they would have to make. Some of these participants expressed an interest in such communities, but cited other commitments, such as work and family obligations, that prevented them from joining. For some participants, the idea of community meetings was not appealing to them, and they felt their time would be better spent conducting family research instead of discussing genealogy topics.

Jane: You know I've thought about it [joining a genealogy community].

Because I know they have a local society here but I guess I, I don't want to, I don't like to go to meetings, I don't want to spend my time in meetings. So to me, if I have a specific question I would rather call somebody with that specific question rather than go to a meeting and just talk about genealogy.

As previous participant responses reflect, and as Jane highlights here, genealogists will often make themselves available to help others, regardless of community membership status. Like the benefits associated with volunteerism, participants felt that by helping others with their genealogy research, they were actually helping themselves make more connections.

Betty: I always laugh because you're only 6 people away from knowing everybody. And the more people you know... It's like [community member] and I have the same maiden name. And as far as we know we're not related. And you know, so she has another whole bunch of [name] than I have. But that's interesting.

Betty references what is commonly known as the degrees of separation among people. Degrees of separation are calculated by determining how many links it takes to connect person A to person B. For instance, there is one degree of separation between my mother and I, two degrees separate my grandmother from me, and so on. This may also be referred to as degrees of relationships, in genealogy vernacular

(Arnold, 1990). Engaging in family genealogy research with an eye toward finding connections between entire families (rather than between individuals) is referred to as horizontal, or parallel, genealogy (1990). In taking a horizontal perspective, genealogists are able to see the interconnectedness of all human beings. This is sometimes cited as a motivating factor behind the generosity of those conducting genealogy research: they may be distantly related to those they assist.

Gender and Personal Safety

Some participants' felt that gender may be another factor contributing to the generosity of genealogy researchers.

Terry: As far as being a woman conducting the research I think there's a distinct advantage. For example, someone is more willing to take you in to their home as a stranger, than they would be if you were a gentleman. So there's, I think there's advantages...I don't want to sound male/female [about] things, but there are distinct differences in women. Women are more nurturing and they're more giving. And I think that nurturing giving ability really... actually people are more willing to help you I think sometimes. And go the extra mile.

While Terry and other participants did discuss benefits of being a woman genealogist, there were also some concerns raised.

Barb: After [sister] and I had been on one of our trips to Southern Ohio there had been several instances of women in these in tiny little cemeteries being attacked. So now we're very careful when we pull in, to take account of what's around us and stuff. And I really hadn't considered that before. I hadn't considered the isolation. Some of them [cemeteries] are so totally off the beaten track. And a lot of them are grown up and stuff around them so that it's the ideal place to have somebody hiding and not even know it. That would be the only drawback [to being a woman] that I could see. Everybody, like I say, it's almost like a different breed of people. They are so friendly and so helpful.

Genealogy researchers often separate genealogy communities from general society when discussing issues of personal safety. This can be seen above when Barb discusses her concerns of being attacked by a stranger in a cemetery, and then works to separate these concerns from the genealogy community by stating that genealogists are so friendly and helpful they are "like a different breed of people." In other words, the idea of interconnectedness, or viewing the genealogy community as one big happy family, provides a sense of safety and protection.

Genealogy as a Site for Resistance

Genealogists, for lack of a better phrase, take care of their own. And, although many genealogists are members of local and/or virtual genealogy societies, there is also a widely held belief that everyone engaged in the act of genealogy research is part of a global genealogy community. Regardless of the size of the individual societies, information is disseminated to them from the global community in a variety of ways. The Internet plays a major role in this information distribution, as do national (primarily North American and Western European) genealogical societies.¹⁰ Community members rely upon one another to share valuable knowledge and resources with their peers.

In identifying the conditions upon which a group becomes a community, members must feel as though they contribute to the group in a positive way. They must also believe their needs will be met by other community members, through a commitment to each other (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Once this is achieved members will come to experience a sense of community (SOC), wherein they will identify with other members in the community and report a shared emotional connection.

¹⁰ Such as the National Genealogical Society, Canadian Genealogy Centre, or Society of Genealogists.

Commitments are made to community members regardless of a group's physical presence. In their study on how online community members experience a sense of virtual community (SOVC), Blanchard and Markus (2004) report that, like face-to-face community members, those in virtual communities also feel a sense of belonging, identification, and support with their virtual peers. Genealogy communities, both virtual and face-to-face, provide spaces for members to come together and share ideas, tips, and resources. The members are linked to one another by their shared passion for genealogy.

The open nature of genealogy communities makes them accessible to a wide array of people. Virtual genealogy communities, in particular, reflect a lack of geographic boundaries or limitations. Face-to-face communities, however, are usually tied to a particular geographic area. This area can be as small as a township or county, or as large as an entire nation. When considering the impact of regional division upon genealogy communities, it is important to also consider Anderson's (1991) argument that geographic delineation, or separation, is an imagined construct used to mark territory and shape national identities.

Using Anderson's (1991) lens to view genealogy communities is helpful to understand the emphasis placed on region by genealogists. In other words, genealogy research often centers on the imagined constructions of geographic areas. As lines are configured and reconfigured on a map the genealogical data is affected.

This may create challenges in tracking the data for family genealogy researchers. It may also alter the family identity with regard to race, ethnicity, and/or nationality.

While territorial classification is widespread and ongoing, there are strategies that genealogy community's employ to overcome challenges brought about by this classification. One example of this, as discussed above, is the lack of geographic boundaries present in virtual genealogy communities. Similarly, while most face-to-face genealogy societies are bound by geography, it is possible to join these communities without physically residing in that area. Many members of local communities join because their ancestors have a connection to the region, not because they themselves live there. Conversely, members may elect to join the community closest to their own residence, even if they are the first in their family to inhabit the area, in an effort to gain support and assistance from other genealogists.

Because women predominantly populate these genealogy communities, such spaces become useful sites to interrogate how these women utilize their (collective) feminist standpoint (Collins, 1998; Sandoval, 2000) to reshape the world around them. For many of the participants in this study one way to resist further oppression of women, from a socio-historical context, is to assign value to the lives of their female ancestors. Through seeking genealogical data for these ancestors, these participants bring the lives of these women to the forefront, refusing to allow their contributions to continually be erased from family or cultural life. Those participants

active in genealogical communities are well situated to develop community agenda's focusing on this work of reclamation.

Similarly, the expert status and authority these community leaders hold presents a unique opportunity for them to assist other women in tracing their female ancestors. In working with less-experienced genealogists, these community members are able to pass along valuable information regarding the genealogical search process, specifically those tips and tricks useful in following the often-elusive female line. And while these communities operate under traditional, or patriarchal, infrastructures, it is important to note that women are often the ones holding positions of power within them. Through these power positions women are able to implement actions resulting in social change, such as the publicizing (and publishing) of women's genealogical data.

While it could be argued that, as an extension of family care, genealogy research is undervalued, its surge in popularity over the last decade leads me to believe that more people are coming to recognize the importance of this data in understanding their own family story/ies. As this popularity continues to grow, women, as genealogy community officials and representatives, have the tools necessary to both resist and subvert patriarchal institutions of power that feed off oppression. They resist in their refusal to be devalued, or to allow other women's lives, past or present, to be erased or overshadowed. And they subvert aspects and

effects of a patriarchal system from their own seemingly innocuous positions of power within these communities, quietly leading the way for like-minded others to follow suit.

CHAPTER VI:
PASSING IT ON

Family genealogical data represents a valuable piece of the family narrative. This data serves many functions, such as explaining where the family is from, the unions that created and shaped the family, and how the family arrived at its current locale. As the genealogical data gets shared among family members, the family identity is altered. The data may work to solidify or alter the existing identity, depending on the narrative coherence of the information. It is in this exchange, the telling and sharing of family story/data, that genealogists have the opportunity to reclaim lost narratives and resist patriarchal oppression.

Intersection(s) of Genealogy, Family, and Community

For the 22 participants in this study, their work in family genealogy is reclaiming their family data and resisting marginalization, in both obvious and subtle ways. The women I interviewed are all passionate about recovering the data that tells their family story. They each articulated particular challenges they felt in conducting such research, and explained their motivation to overcome those hurdles. As each woman spoke about her family, she expressed a desire to care for them by giving them this data. In sharing this information with her family, the women

explained, they were passing along the gift of K/knowing those who came before them. It is through this process, which I have identified as K/knowing, each woman came to better understand not only her family, but also herself.

This study also examined the roles women play within genealogical communities. Four of the ten participants active in these communities hold, or have held, top-ranking officer positions within these societies. They, along with the other six participants' spoke about the benefits they received from being a part of these communities, such as guidance and support. More importantly, they reflected on the benefits their communities received from their individual contributions. Some of these contributions include organizational leadership, time spent volunteering, office/administrative management, and time spent assisting other community members.

In most instances the participants identified their contributions to the communities without hesitation. They understood how these contributions helped to enhance the community, and spoke openly about them. This, however, was not the case when discussing the contributions their genealogical research made toward their families. When asked about whom they shared this data with, and how it was received, most of the participants (regardless of community membership) downplayed their contribution in some way. Sentiments such as "their eyes glaze over and they're like oh no, she's going to talk genealogy, please save us," (Terry)

were commonplace when describing their families' reactions. Despite the importance they placed on gathering and sharing this information, reactions such as these made the women feel like they were just being humored about their genealogy hobby. This was especially the case when such reactions came from immediate family members such as children, spouses, or siblings.

While the participants were often willing to let their own contributions to the family be under-, or de-valued, they were not as willing to let the collective contributions of women suffer the same fate. Participants discussed the importance of reclaiming women's genealogical data, the difficulty in finding this data, and the frustration they felt at the institutional structure(s) that erase women's familial and societal contributions. In reclaiming and retelling the stories of women, genealogists are able to bring the contributions of women to the forefront. Additionally, in researching the lives of these women, and through situating them within a historical context, genealogists are able to reflect upon and describe the socio-historical systems of oppression these women experienced.

In this study I draw upon existing literature in family communication, narrative theories, feminist standpoint theories, and community. This literature created a starting place for my study, a framework, which informed my vision for the project. That vision, once constructed, demanded the use of critical ethnography and grounded theory as guiding methodologies. The use of critical ethnographic

principles in developing interview protocol and questions resulted in a participant-researcher bond, both of us giving and taking generously with our family stories, our genealogy struggles, our challenges, and our goals. These discussions gave life to the project, and to the act of genealogy research. The subsequent use of grounded theory to code and analyze the participants responses allowed their words to be spoken in their own voice. Their rich and meaningful narratives offer insight in to the multi-faceted webs created by genealogy, family, and community.

As the research questions reflect, it is these very webs I wish to interrogate. Understanding the impact genealogy has upon family communication becomes increasingly important as more and more people begin to research and document their own family lineage. My first research question, what motivates this genealogy research, has many answers. As reflected in the participant responses, people seek to find their genealogical information to build or sustain the family identity. They want to answer questions about who their ancestors were and where they came from. The family story is brought to life by these facts, and family members are able to form connections with relatives past as they come to K/know them. The desire to understand and share the family story reflects both the values of fidelity and coherence found in Fisher's (1984, 1987) narrative paradigm and the desire for a finished family narrative proposed by Goodall's (2005, 2006) narrative inheritance theory.

To better understand these types of familial connections, or the absence thereof, my second research question focuses on the impact genealogical data has upon family communication. The participants felt, for the most part, that their genealogy research worked to bring their family closer together. They talked about how the data is often a bridge that connects them to extended family members they may not otherwise have regular contact with. Having the genealogy information, they said, was particularly useful at large gatherings where people might have difficulty starting conversations with family members they were not especially close with. Family members, regardless of closeness, function within a system (Littlejohn, 1999) where they are expected to fulfill the duties associated with their given roles (Yerby, et al., 1995) and interact with each other in prescribed ways. Although the participants felt that genealogy made an impact on the family communication in mostly positive ways, some of the women did cite instances where this information had a negative impact. This happened most often when the data did not support the existing family story, or more significantly, its identity. Familial conflict was also reported with regard to with whom and how the genealogy data was collected, and who was included in it. Drawing from family network theory (Galvin & Brommel, 1996), the participants cited feelings of frustration when their family members did not provide or exchange information as expected, particularly with regard to

genealogical data, and/or when extended family members did not seem to appreciate the efforts of the family genealogist.

Since women are more likely to take on the role of family genealogist, my third research question addresses the issues of social justice and patriarchal oppression, as a means of understanding how they affect women genealogists, as well as how female genealogists overcome these issues. Participants were asked to reflect on both their own individual standpoint, as well as the collective standpoint of women (Hartsock, 1998; Naples, 2003). Participants reported a number of challenges with regard to tracing female ancestors. These challenges, they felt, were due to the socio-political positioning of women throughout history. In particular they cited issues derived from marital name changes, women's inability to own land prior to 1840, women's erasure from the U.S. Census prior to 1850, and the refusal to allow women to vote prior to 1920. To combat these issues for future genealogists, the participants discussed measures they were taking to record their own lives, such as journaling their thoughts in diaries or creating scrapbooks. They also talked about the inclusion of their maiden name in legal documents to make it easier to trace them over time.

Another issue that came up in the participant responses was that of women's safety when conducting genealogy research. Some of the women discussed their concerns when being in strange environments, such as cemeteries or out-of-town

libraries, seeking family data. These concerns, they felt, stemmed from a broader cultural devaluation of women (hooks, 1984), and were not specific to the genealogy community. In fact, many of the participants felt that within the genealogy community women benefited from their gender more than men. They discussed how, as a woman, they may have access to people and places that men would be denied. They also believed that women are better at genealogy research because they are willing to examine the facts to reconstruct the story, rather than being focused solely on names and dates, a research method they attribute to male family genealogists, and is a situation that sometimes caused conflict between family members of different genders.

These types of family conflicts are often discussed among genealogy community members. Participants engaged in these communities reported receiving support and guidance from other community members. My fourth and final research question focuses on how membership in these communities impacts the views of women regarding the importance of genealogical data collection. These women discussed their roles in their genealogy communities, as both participants and leaders. Community membership, they felt, allowed them to form bonds with others engaged in similar genealogical pursuits, offering and receiving support and assistance (Blanchard & Markus, 2004; McMillan & Chavis, 1986). These women were able to articulate how their efforts benefited the communities, as well as how the

community membership benefited them. Drawing upon the three institutions Anderson (1991) identifies as shaping one's geographic domain, the census, the map, and the museum, the participants are able to prioritize research and reclamation of women's data, an element they believed extremely important within the global genealogy community. Additionally, hearing the narratives of other community members helped them to recognize the importance of genealogy data, and the impact it had upon their own family identity (Higgins, 2002; Simmons, 2002).

Limitations

In any research study the researcher must make choices. This study is no exception. Although the participant pool represented a wide array of individuals, there were particular limitations, including gender, racial diversity, and geographic diversity. In this study I focused exclusively on women who conduct family genealogy research. I believed it was important to focus on women for two reasons. First, and foremost, women are more likely to research family genealogy than men, as demonstrated by user demographic statistics (Footnote 2, p. 7). Second, as women are still largely responsible for care of the family (Barker, 2005), I wanted to better understand how women genealogists might position their family research as an extension of that care. In electing to focus solely on women's experience with genealogy research, however, the experiences of male genealogists are excluded.

A second limiting factor in this study is a lack of racial diversity. As stated earlier, 21 of the participants' self-identified as Caucasian or White. The remaining participant did not respond to that question, but was also white-appearing. Two of these participants discussed, in their interviews, their ability to document Native American ancestors in their lineage, and a third believed she was the descendant of African-American ancestors, but had not yet been able to verify that belief. The exclusion of women of color was not a choice but rather is a reflection of the genealogy community in Northwest Ohio.

Similarly, the third limiting factor in this study is geographic diversity. All of the participants were Ohio residents, 21 from Northwest Ohio, and one from Northeast Ohio. Further, almost all of the participants reported deep ties to their geographic communities, which shaped their genealogy research experiences, especially with regard to availability of records and data. I believe each of the factors I have labeled as limitations above offer opportunities for future research. Racial and geographic diversity, in particular, warrant examination, as they are two key components to family genealogy data. While each of the above limitations provides opportunities for further research, there are also other areas of family genealogy would benefit from additional examination.

Opportunities for Future Research

This study examined the connections between genealogy, family communication, and community. It is a response to Combs' (2003) call for communication scholars to utilize genealogy as a tool for understanding social and family life. Just as Combs saw opportunities to further his research, I believe my study highlights multiple research possibilities for the future. The first of these is a deeper investigation into virtual genealogy communities. Genealogists were among the first to utilize the Internet as a space for community. This is, however, a population that is still under-researched. Gaining insight into how these communities function and the impact they have upon family genealogy research and communication would be useful, particularly as most amateur genealogists are involved in some way with Internet genealogy research.

A second area of study I believe would be beneficial to communication scholars is that of family reunions. Many of the participants in this study discussed family reunions as a way of connecting with extended family members. They also identified family reunions as a time to communicate with family members to both collect and disseminate family genealogical information. It would be interesting to research the impact these sporadic family gatherings have upon family communication. Additionally, participants discussed concerns that the frequency of

family reunions was being reduced, and spoke about a stronger reliance upon technology to communicate with these extended relatives instead.

The third and final area of future research I would like to address is that of family artifacts. In my discussions with the study participants many of them mentioned items they had inherited from their ancestors, as well as items they intended to pass down to younger generations upon their death. With each of these artifacts there are stories about its journey and its previous owner(s). In some instances participants also referenced the collection of genealogy data as one of these artifacts they would like to pass on. I believe the literature on family communication and family narrative would be enhanced by further study of how family artifacts work to shape the family identity through the telling of these stories.

The Elusive Zibley's

Two years have passed since I first heard the name Zibley. I am no further ahead in my tracking of these ancestors than I was the day I first tried to find them. And when I think about who I am, I am much quicker to reflect on the names and stories of the people I have been able to find in my search. My identity is wrapped up with theirs. I like to think about where they lived, and try to imagine what their lives were like. I share stories about these people, often noting how knowing about them has helped me better understand myself. I wonder what it was like, especially as a

woman, to have lived without a voice, without a name or a vote to call my own.

Often I wonder what these people would think of me, of my life. Would they be as interested in K/knowning me as I am in K/knowning them?

And then I return to the unK/known. There are, of course, days when my lack of Zibley-hunting success is incredibly frustrating and I want to just give up the search. However, the women I interviewed taught me that no one really gives up their search. I might focus on other family lines. I might even stop genealogy research altogether for a while. But I will never completely give up my search. The genealogy bug, the desire to K/known, has bitten me. Not being able to find a particular person/line is quite common, they tell me. I can think of it as a badge of honor. I'm a genealogist!

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1) How long have you been conducting genealogy research for your family?
- 2) How did you initially become interested in family genealogy research?
- 3) With whom, if anyone, do you conduct your research?
- 4) What methods do you use to research genealogical data (ex: family documents, family photos, census data, cemetery records, Internet websites, library databases, etc.)?
- 5) How often do you use each of these methods?
- 6) How much time, on a weekly basis, would you say you spend conducting genealogical research?
- 7) Are you a member of a genealogy community, either *face-to-face* or *online*?
 - a. In what ways do you view your membership in that community beneficial to your genealogy research?
 - b. Are there any negative aspects of that community?
 - c. How much time and effort do you put into maintaining your status as a member of that community? What activities do you most often engage in as part of that community?
 - d. Are you a member of a 2nd (3rd, 4th, etc.) genealogical community?

- e. If so, repeat questions 7a-7c.
- 8) Are you a member of any women-only genealogical communities?
- a. If so, how do those communities differ, if at all, from mixed-gender communities you participate in?
- 9) What motivates you to investigate your family lineage?
- 10) What keeps you motivated over long periods of time and/or when you hit a major roadblock?
- 11) Which members of your family do you discuss your genealogy research with?
- 12) How often, and in what context, do you discuss this research with them?
- 13) How do you present the information to your family (ex: verbal, written, documents, family trees, access to websites, books, etc.)?
- 14) In what ways, if any, does your discussion of genealogical data effect the communication with members of your family (ex: brings family closer together, incites arguments regarding validity of data, encourages other family members to conduct their own genealogy research, causes frustration that you are the only one interested in doing this research, etc.)?
- 15) Do you volunteer the genealogical information to your family and/or do they request it from you?
- a. How does your family request the data from you?
 - b. In what format do they prefer the data be given to them?

c. When, or how often, does your family request this data?

16) Many genealogy books make specific note of the challenges that can occur when tracing female ancestors in genealogy research. As a woman, what challenges, if any, do you face when conducting your family genealogy research? If present, how do you overcome those challenges?

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT EMAIL/LETTER

To: Potential Participant

From: Amy Smith, Doctoral Student

Date:

RE: Participation in research study

You are invited to be in a research study examining family genealogy research. As part of my work towards a doctorate degree in the School of Communication Studies, I am conducting a research study examining the impact on family communication by genealogical research for women. This study will focus primarily on your perspectives and experiences regarding your genealogy research. This study is being conducted for my dissertation, and the purpose of the study is to examine the role of family genealogy within family communication. Understanding the impact genealogy has upon family communication is important because family life shapes our viewpoints and interactions with others.

Your participation requires one 60-minute interview with me at a location of your choosing. The anticipated risks of participating in this study are no greater than those you normally encounter in daily life. This study may benefit you, as well as others, by providing insight into family genealogy's role in family communication.

Information you provide will remain confidential and your identity will be protected, upon your request, throughout the study and publication of study results. I will have exclusive access to the data/information you provide, and your identity will not be revealed in any published results unless you specifically request identification. Study results will be presented in a summary manner and/or with the use of pseudonyms.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you can refrain from answering any questions without penalty or explanation. You are free to withdraw consent and to discontinue participation in the research study at any time. If you decide to participate and change your mind later, you may withdraw your consent and stop your participation at any time without penalty or explanation.

If you have any questions or comments about this study, you can contact me at xxx-xxx-xxxx or amysmi@bgsu.edu, or my dissertation chair, Dr. Laura Lengel, at xxx-xxx-xxxx or lengell@bgsu.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board, Bowling Green State University, (419) 372-7716 (hsrb@bgsu.edu), if any problems or concerns arise during the course of the study.

Sincerely,

Amy Smith

Doctoral Student

School of Communication Studies

APPENDIX C
CONSENT FORM

I agree to participate in the genealogy/family communication research study being conducted by Amy Smith. I have been informed that I should address all comments and questions about the study to Amy Smith, xxx-xxx-xxxx or amysmi@bgsu.edu, or to her dissertation chair, Dr. Laura Lengel, xxx-xxx-xxxx or lengell@bgsu.edu. I may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board, Bowling Green State University, (419) 372-7716 (hsrb@bgsu.edu), if I have any problems or concerns during the course of the study. Information has been provided to me about the risks of participation in this study, in that they are no greater than those encountered in everyday life. I have also been informed that I have a right to withdraw from this study at any time, through verbal or written notification to Amy Smith.

(print name)

(signature)

(date)

APPENDIX D

HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

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October 12, 2007

TO: Amy Marie Smith
COMS

FROM: Richard Rowlands⁰²
HSRB Administrator

RE: HSRB Project No.: H08D031GE7

TITLE: *Family Webs: The Impact of Women's Genealogy Research on Family Communication*

You have met the conditions for approval for your project involving human subjects. **As of October 12, 2007, your project has been granted final approval by the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB). This approval expires on September 23, 2008.** You may proceed with subject recruitment and data collection.

The final approved version of the consent document(s) is attached. Consistent with federal OHRP guidance to IRBs, the consent document(s) bearing the HSRB approval/expiration date stamp is the only valid version and you must use copies of the date-stamped document(s) in obtaining consent from research subjects.

You are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB and to use only approved forms. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures (including increases in the number of participants), please send a request for modifications immediately to the HSRB via this office. Please notify me, in writing (fax: 372-6916 or email: hsrb@bgsu.edu) upon completion of your project.

Good luck with your work. Let me know if this office or the HSRB can be of assistance as your project proceeds.

Comments/ Modifications:
Stamped original of information sheet and consent form are coming to you via campus mail.

c: Dr. Lara Martin Lengel

Research Category: EXPEDITED #7

Post-It* Fax Note	7671	Date	10/12/07	# of pages	3
To	Dr. Lara Martin Lengel	From	Rich Rowlands		
Co./Dept.	COMS	Co.	ORC		
Phone #		Phone #	2-7716		
Fax #	2-0202	Fax #	2-6916		

APPENDIX E

FAMILY GENEALOGY TERMS AND PROCESSES

While there is little scholarly research surrounding family genealogy, there is a wealth of information marketed to mass consumers around the globe. Since these are the sites of information that amateur genealogists use, I draw upon these resources to offer an explanation of the ways in which genealogy research is conducted, as well as the common terminology associated with family genealogy.

These sources, made readily available to the public, are usually presented in a “how-to” format, teaching people the tricks and tools for conducting their family genealogy. Some books are best used for general information, such as how to find records, or the best way to document and verify data collected.¹¹ However, other books deal specifically with special interests surrounding genealogy. These may include information about using the Internet to trace family lines, collecting and caring for family photographs, and knowing what to look for when conducting research in a cemetery.¹² There are also texts dedicated to helping readers overcome hurdles associated with their particular race/ethnicity, such as how to conduct

¹¹ See Arnold, 1990; Parker, 1996; Rising, 2005.

¹² See Taylor, 2000; Carmack, 2002.

research on African-American and Native-American families.¹³ Additionally, many genealogy researchers often have difficulty finding female ancestors, and there are texts dedicated to guiding readers through this process as well.¹⁴

Defining common terms used in genealogy research makes up a large part of these available genealogy research resources. The following terms are taken from Arnold's (1990) comprehensive guide for conducting genealogy, but can be found throughout genealogy resources. Arnold, a genealogy expert, begins by discussing the "beginnings of kinship," citing reasons for ancestral research such as genetic kinship and common traits. Arnold traces the historical change from maternal (cave people) to paternal (Neolithic era) kinship lines, arguing that the concept of monogamy was responsible for this shift. Under paternal kinship, clans emerged and then blended into tribes. Endogamy (breeding within a social group) was practical during this period, but as tribes grew exogamy (breeding outside the social group) became possible. Outbreeding, or the bringing of new blood to the line, became highly desirable thereafter.

Arnold (1990) states that kinship is most often figured bilaterally. Bilateral kinship traces descent through both the maternal and paternal lines, rather than a

¹³ See Carpenter, 1991; Smith & Croom, 2003; Write, Rives, Kirkham, & Bunting, 2004.

¹⁴ See Carmack, 1998; Schaefer, 1999.

unilateral approach, which focuses on either the maternal or paternal line. These lines may be examined through lineal ascent, focusing on a straight line between children, parents, and grandparents, or they may be traced using collaterals. Collaterals utilize an oblique line of descent, including siblings, aunts/uncles, nieces/nephews, and cousins. Arnold discusses three types of families under examination: family of orientation (includes parents, their offspring, and other parental relatives); family of procreation (for the purpose of having children); and, family of affinity (kinship group to which a spouse belongs, i.e. – in-laws).

Furthermore, genealogy takes into account the degrees of relationship between persons in the family line. The starting person (this can be the researcher, or a person of interest, etc.) is assigned a number of 0, and the degrees of relation are counted upward (Arnold, 1990). This would give parents a degree of relation of 1, grandparents 2, and so on, up the family chain. Kinship generations are calculated differently than societal generations in that one generation is a single step in the line of descent from another ancestor, whereas societal generations are calculated in terms of decades and are more inclusive. Arnold also highlights other areas of interest in genealogy, such as onomastics (study of the origin, meaning, and evolution of names) and horizontal/parallel genealogy (the connection between families). Arguing that horizontal genealogy is the best approach to take, Arnold

discusses the study of overlapping pedigrees as a way to better understand the interconnectedness of all people on the planet.

Wolfman (2002) discusses ideas similar to Arnold's (1990) description of horizontal genealogy in his instructional book for children conducting genealogy research. He discusses having children write their own stories, as well as making a Pedigree Chart for themselves. In conjunction with this he encourages them to make family charts and to track down important family documents and artifacts. Wolfman identifies the importance of onomastics and encourages readers to seek out the history behind their own names.

Examining the close connection between onomastics and ethnic origin, Wolfman (2002) spends a great deal of time teaching readers about the immigration process in the United States. He documents the modes of transportation commonly used to get here, as well as the reasons particular groups of people sought relocation from their home countries. This includes information about where immigrants settled after their arrival, and what their lives were like. Additionally, Wolfman explains the process for immigrants to gain citizenship and the close-knit communities that were formed within immigrant enclaves.

Wolfman (2002) also addresses issues surrounding the research process for amateur genealogists, such as how to use the Internet to complete record searches. He explains where and how records are kept in facilities such as the National

Archives and the LDS Family History Library system.¹⁵ He briefly touches on data collection for different circumstances, such as adoption, recent immigration, and African-American/Native-American status. Wolfman suggests creative ways for children to share their data within their family and community, such as making a genealogical scrapbook, family newsletter, family book, or family website.

Other genealogy texts, such as Rising's (2005) book, discuss ways to overcome common problems when conducting genealogy research. Rising discusses overcoming issues such as finding marriage/birth/death records prior to civil

¹⁵ The LDS Family History Library system is discussed quite frequently in genealogy books. This library system is maintained by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), whose religious beliefs include recording genealogy data for everyone, regardless of their religious affiliation. Records housed within this library system may be found online at www.familysearch.org, and/or at the main library in Salt Lake City, UT, or one of the many regional library branches across the country. Some items may only be found in Salt Lake City, thus many interested in collecting their family genealogy data make a pilgrimage to the main LDS library. Parker (1996) addresses such a trip in a book entitled *Going to Salt Lake City to do family history research*. Parker offers readers information about what to expect, what researchers should bring with them, and how to navigate the library.

registration, dealing with issues regarding missing census data, and teaching readers how to find court documents when the courthouse has been destroyed. Rising lists ten mistakes to avoid when conducting family research: only using one or two good sources exclusively; getting locked into an idea or theory you have developed; justifying reasons for conflict within the data; trying to link oneself to “desirable” ancestors; only examining one piece of data at a time; looking for “magic” documents that will answer all your questions; hopscotching across decades; only looking at surnames; giving documents significance based on age; and, putting off assembling, organizing, and publishing your work. Mistakes such as these are commonplace, and should be avoided at all costs according to Rising, as they lead to wasted hours, contaminated data, and flawed outcomes.

Extending the discussion beyond common problems in conducting genealogy research, many authors (Carmack, 1998; Carpenter, 1991; Schaefer, 1999; Smith & Croom, 2003) discuss issues surrounding tracing particular types of people. Both Carmack and Schaefer articulate the challenges that may be present when tracking female ancestors, primarily due to marital name changes and laws forbidding property ownership by women. They encourage genealogy researchers to examine alternate sources of data, such as journals, city directories, church records, and newspapers when seeking information about female relatives. Schaefer details the rights of women in civil and common law for each state from the 19th century to

present so that readers might better understand where to look and how to read particular documents. Furthermore, Carmack asks readers to research and document the social history of women throughout specific time periods when analyzing their genealogical data. Some of the topics she raises include sexuality, childbearing, women's work, and the moral reform movement.

In addition to helping researchers working to uncover women's familial lines, Carpenter (1991) seeks to address specific issues in tracing ancestors of Native-American descent. Suggestions such as familiarizing oneself with particular tribal traditions and naming practices are made. Carpenter also discusses what to do if you do not know the tribe name, how to deal with naming differences (Indian names v. assigned English names), and the best method(s) for contacting the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Similarly, Smith and Croom (2003) present methods for overcoming difficulties when researching African-American branches of the family tree. They discuss multiple sources such as the Bureau of Refugees, Freedman's Savings and Trust Company, and the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections (NUCMC). Due to the entry of many Africans into America as slaves, Smith and Croom underscore the importance of looking at documents such as chattel and manumission/emancipation records, as well as seeking records of the slaveholding family for possible information regarding slave ancestors.

Beyond these how-to books and guides there are a myriad of websites and communities dedicated to the tracing of one's familial ancestors. The availability of information via the Internet has turned many people into amateur genealogists. Documents and records that used to be available only in physical spaces, thereby limiting access, are now available to anyone with Internet access (these sites typically charge membership fees). According to a 1999 article published in *Brandweek* (Family tree sites, 1999) the top four paid genealogy websites had a combined membership of over 112,000 and counting. In 2007 www.ancestry.com alone reported over 2.5 million active users (Burgon, 2007). These websites often distribute memberships for free but require an upgraded (paid) membership for database/record access.¹⁶ There are, however, other websites available to users for free, such as those run by the federal (United States) government or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.¹⁷

¹⁶ See www.genealogy.com and www.ancestry.com.

¹⁷ See U.S. Social Security Death Index and the LDS Family History Library.