

**Of Ketchup and Kin:
Dinnertime Conversations as a Major Source of Family
Knowledge, Family Adjustment, and Family Resilience**

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When people in their fifties and sixties are feeling low and dream about comfort food, they might long for some meatloaf and mashed potatoes or a chicken and dumplings. When those in their thirties and forties, pine for a gastronomical antidepressant, their minds might flash on macaroni and cheese or even TV dinners eaten on small folding tables. Twenty-somethings report that their comfort foods include pot roast, ice cream, Chinese food, broccoli casserole, and potato soup. When it comes to today's children and adolescents, however, it doesn't stretch the imagination too much to conjure the following scene thirty or forty years from now:

Ashley: I am feeling so down. Nothing seems to be able to lift my spirits.

Cameron: We need some comfort food. Let's make a sandwich and wrap it in paper and eat it in the back of a van.

Ashley: Wow, that's exactly what I need!

While admittedly tongue-in-cheek, this scenario illuminates the fact that fewer and fewer—if any—meals are prepared or consumed at home as we set out on our journey into the 21st Century. Statistics tell us that as many as 70% of meals are eaten out of the home and on average, less than 33% of American families eat together more than two times per week. And when these families do eat together, they more often than not eat food that has been prepared completely in another setting or brought in from another setting and re-heated for home consumption.

There are many who express grave concern about the changes in American family life that have been contiguous with the loss of American “table time.” In a large study of changes in family time use patterns from 1981 to 1997, Hofferth (1999; 2000) has reported that there was a 33% drop in family dinners commensurate with what she termed an almost complete disappearance of family conversations. Children's free time dropped by almost 12 hours per week with play time dropping to a low of only nine hours. Unstructured outdoor activities were halved in this 16-year period. There are only so many hours in any family's week; things taken from one place will show up in another. Hofferth identified the new uses of these lost hours. Involvement in structured sports doubled to almost 5.5 hours per week with the unanticipated consequent of a five fold increase (up to three hours per week) of non-participating children standing along the sidelines with their parents watching siblings play soccer, tag football, and the like. Interestingly, time spent on school work also increased by 50%.

While there are many who decry the loss of the family meal time and the increase in structured activities (not always chosen by the child), our concern is with what else is lost with the loss of the family mealtime. Hofferth cites data that indicate that the single strongest predictor of academic achievement scores and low rates of behavioral problems was amount of home-based family meal time. She notes that meal time was a more powerful predictor than time spent in school, studying, church, or participation in sports. This result held even when controlled for race, gender, education, and age of parents, income and family size. She found further that American teenagers who had five or more dinners per week with a parent had higher rates of academic success, better psychological adjustment, lower rates of alcohol and drug use, and lower suicidal risk. Eating together surely is a good thing.

Meal time, however, is a complex variable. Few would claim that simply sitting and eating together possesses the immunizing or healing powers accorded it. One cannot imagine that a family that sits together watching TV or even in total silence is deriving great benefits from their experience. Clearly, there is some thing or some things that happen among families when they sit down together that cannot or does not occur when they do not do so. It is likely that the meals themselves are not the sole source of benefit; something in the discourse must play a part.

Irwin Yalom, the interpersonal/existential psychotherapist and author, has noted that one must differentiate between the container and the contents in human discourse. He asks us to consider whether four old friends gather together each Friday evening to play bridge or whether they play bridge each Friday evening so that they can be together. From his perspective the latter understanding of the bridge game is the preferred one, because it goes to the most basic of our human needs—to be with other people in order to fend off the anxiety of our existential aloneness. In Yalom's sense, the family meal is also at once both container and contents. It is a time that a family gathers together to eat, but it is also a reason for the family's gathering together.

If one is conversant in existential theories of human behavior, it is easy to see why being with other people is important. However, beyond the fact that a family is together during its meal times, what other benefits are among the contents of the container that we call the family meal? It has been our belief and the reason for our research that when families gather together for meals, they generate narratives in the form of developing interpretations of ongoing events in the family's life as they pass on narratives dealing with the family's history.

The Family Narratives Project

The work that we describe here has been performed as part of the larger work of the Sloan Center for the Study of Myth and Ritual in American Life at Emory University. Our major objectives are to examine the process of co-construction of narratives about both targeted family events and everyday family experiences and to relate the process of narrative co-construction to standardized measures of family functioning and child well-being. Our focus on co-constructed family narratives follows from clinical theory already reviewed, as well as empirical data indicating that family narratives provide an important context for child socialization (e.g., Fivush, 1994; Miller, 1994). Several researchers have described the ways in which families discuss past events with and around children in everyday contexts (Fiese & Marjinsky, 1999; Miller, 1994; Ochs & Capps, 2001). The resulting narrative descriptions highlight ways in which individual identities and family relationships are defined and clarified within these conversational interactions.

In addition to revealing how families communicate, family narrative interactions are also related to child outcome. For example, Fiese and Marjinsky (1999) rated family dinnertime narratives on coherence and emotional modulation. Parents' appropriate modulation of affect, but not overall conversational coherence, was linked to fewer behavior problems in children. Ochs, Taylor, Rudolph, and Smith (1992) examined the ways in which families re-tell the same stories, reworking the narrative to explain and clarify. Their descriptions illuminate how these give-and-take interactions go beyond

influencing memories for the events; they encourage perspective-taking, critical thinking, theory-building, and relationship roles within the family. Thus from multiple theoretical perspectives, we propose that family narratives contribute to the current well-being and future resilience of the family as a unit and the current adjustment and future psychological immunity of its individual members.

In our research, we focused on families with a pre-adolescent child because the clinical literature suggests that the teenage years are particularly rife with family conflict and this is the developmental period when children are most likely to begin to have problems with identity that can lead to serious outcomes such as delinquency, depression, and substance-abuse (Carr, 1999; Lerner & Lerner, 2001). Our goal is to establish family patterns of communication that may buffer children from the difficulties of navigating the teenage years, and our plan is to follow these families over several years to assess long term relations among family narratives, family functioning, and individual outcome. Forty two-parent families with a target child between the ages of 9 and 12 years are participating. Thirty-three are dual-earner families, and 7 are single-earner families. Half of the families have a pre-adolescent daughter, 29 families are Caucasian, 6 are African or African-American and 5 are mixed race. Thirty of the families are a traditional nuclear family, 8 are blended families and 2 are extended families with at least one additional adult living with them.

In the larger project, we are collecting both elicited and spontaneous narratives from the families. For the elicited narratives, during a home visit, a research assistant asked the family to discuss one shared emotionally positive event and one emotionally negative event, something stressful that the family experienced together. Details about these narratives and some preliminary findings are discussed in greater depth in Fivush, Bohanek, Robertson, and Duke (in press).

Family Dinnertime Conversations

In addition to the elicited narratives, families were also asked to tape record for transcription two of their dinnertime conversations. To optimize spontaneity (despite the presence of a tape recorder), the families were not joined by a researcher during their meals. The degree of conversation and length of conversation varied from family to family, as did the amount of food-related (e.g., pass the ketchup) and non-food-related talk (e.g., what happened in school today). Preliminary data indicate that the average amount of food-related talk was about 20-30%, and non-food related talk was 70-80%.

From among the dozens of hours of family dinnertime conversations, we have selected some excerpts to provide a flavor for the sorts of things that middle class working families talk about. As in past research (Ochs & Capps, 2001, Ochs et al, 1992), we have found that they do not talk about any one thing for very long. Rather, topics seem to shift back and forth among food-related content, school-related content, family issues, problem-solving, and the like. The norm appears to be a sequence of varied topics, most often initiated by one parent. Interlaced with food-content is what we think is the emotional/psychological “meat and potatoes” of family narratives—passing on stories, understanding experiences, teaching, learning, defining identities, and establishing a secure home base. The following excerpts illustrate these various functions of family dinnertime conversations (TC stands for the pre-adolescent target

child, Sib1, Sib2, etc. refers to the other children in the family, <> refers to overlapping talk, “xxx” refers to an unintelligible word and (unintelligible) is used when several words cannot be understood from the tape):

Example One: On food and learning

TC: Math and science. See some days we don't have some subjects and some days we do.

Mom: Oh, I see.

TC: And we're learning about the five different things that like the kingdom, like fungi and stuff like that?

Dad: The five different things of what?

TC: Of like the kingdom um...

Mom: (Laughs) What?

TC: It's something like, like these five different plant groups or something. Like fungus/ fungi. Fungus is fungi...we're doing a xxxx...I'm in the fungi group.

Mom: (Laughs). (Unintelligible).

TC: I'm the fungi group.

Dad: What are the other groups?

TC: Corinthian, pistranimi...(laughs).

Mom: (Laughs).

TC: Pastrami.

Dad: Xxx Something tells me you have a little more reading to do for your homework tonight.

TC: No, I...no. No, no, no, no, no...no, no. I-I just...see I-I don't need to worry about anyone else's...(laughs) (unintelligible)

Mom: (Laughs).

TC: I don't need to worry about anyone else's group; just mine.

Dad: Yes, I think you do because you obviously have no understanding of the material.

TC: Yes I do! Fungi is fungus.

Mom: (Laughs).

Dad: Lets talk a little bit about the Mexican Revolution. You know what's the difference?

Sib 1: What?

Dad: Now, here in the States, what they call the American Revolution is really...

Sib 1: It's <British.

Dad: Is really> the War of Independence. In Mexico, we call that the War of Independence. And what here in the States they call the Civil War, is what we in Mexico call <the Revolution.

Mom: The Revolution. >

Dad: The War of Independence in Mexico was in 18...8

Mom: Even before the um, the Americans did it.

Dad: No!

Mom: No?

Dad: <Huh uh. The Americans...

Mom: (Unintelligible). >

Dad: ...The American Independence in 1776...

TC: Does all this have to do with my brother's report?

Mom: Uh huh.

Dad: No, it has to do with your general knowledge.

Mom: Do you all want to have general knowledge?

TC: Yeah.

Dad: The Mexican Independence was in 1810. And that was Mexico against the Spaniards. And who was the leader of the Mexican Independence?

Sib 1: (Unintelligible).

Dad: Miguel Hidalgo.

Mom: Miguel Hidalgo Xxxx.

Dad: Miguel Hidalgo. That was...and he was, you know, and he is the one that rang the bell and...

Mom: Uh huh. But don't you find the name interesting; Miguel Hidalgo Xxxx. <Miguel Hidalgo (unintelligible). (Laughs).

Dad: But then...(Chuckles)>. But then, but then, after the Mexican Independence from Spain there were a bunch of governments in Mexico. And one of the last governments...

Mom: Was a dictatorship.

This excerpt begins with the child discussing a current school science project. Both the mother and father are immediately interested in hearing about the project, and the father in particular is interested in making sure the child knows the material at a level that the father deems acceptable. So the introduction of "what happened at school that day" turns into a science quiz, but notice that it is all done with good humor and lots of laughter. The child is learning that his schoolwork is important, his parents value what he is learning, but very much in a secure and affectionate context. The father then turns to a discussion of the Mexican Revolution, a topic the younger brother is studying in school. This lesson is particularly interesting because the family is of Mexican descent and this lesson is in the service of both academic guidance and helping the children to form a national identity that is both American and Mexican. Thus the conversation about what happened that day at school becomes an important lesson in family and individual identity.

Example Two: On food and relationships

TC: Well, this uh little conversation <is turning out to be fun.

Dad: It has> nothing to do with it.

Mom: I'm trying to get you to, you know, converse.

Dad: (Unintelligible).

TC: (Sings) Da, de, da, de...my Bonnie...

Mom: I'm sorry.
TC: Love at first sight, huh?
Mom: Yeah.
TC: Dad? Never mind. Was it really love at first sight with you two?
Mom: Oh, please.
TC: It probably was a divorce at one point. (Snickers).
Mom: No.
TC: Is this how you do it?
Mom: Oh no, honey. First you toast it.
TC: (Laughs). Oh.
Dad: Do not put that in the toaster (unintelligible).
Mom: Well, you know, you can put it <(unintelligible).
Dad: You can put it> <put it on a pan and put it in the oven.
Mom: Put it on a pan and put it in the oven. >
Dad: Put it on a pan and put it in the oven.
TC: I thought I did it right.
Mom: No. On a pan honey. How about that blue pan right there?
TC: It's got stuff on it. (Clanking) Oh gee. (Laughs)
Mom: (Laughs).
Dad: (Unintelligible). It's gonna get worse...
Mom: A trick door. Oh, gosh.
Dad: Here. Maayan, here! Maayan!
TC: What?
Dad: No, no, this is fine.
TC: No! It's got cheese on it! I don't want cheese!
Dad: No cheese. Put it on.
TC: I see a cheese.
Dad: Just put it on. (Unintelligible).
TC: (Unintelligible) the cheese.
Mom: Oh, don't throw food.
TC: The cheese just sort of stuck to that, I swear to God.
Mom: You think it's gonna be love at first sight for you, Maayan.
TC: No.
Mom: Ooh, you have ketchup on your finger.
TC: It's gonna be kill at first sight.
Mom: That's lovely. What's that supposed to mean?

In this excerpt, the family is in the process of preparing food before sitting down to the table and in the context of the mother trying to get the father to converse, the child asks obliquely about the beginning of their relationship, "Love at first sight, huh?" Although the story of how the parents met never gets fully explicated, this illustrates the way in which family stories about events that happened before the child was born, indeed events that formed the family into which the child was born, become part of the interwoven family history. In fact, these events begin to define the child's individual identity, as when the mother asks, "You think it's gonna be love at first sight for you?" making an explicit link between the parents history and the child's future. While this is going on in the background, the process of learning about food preparation is in the

foreground. So we see the interweaving of the formation of family and food as a deeply interconnected relation.

Example Three: On food and other families

Mom: The Thai chili> is much better. And then Julia got the satay. She got six satay. She ate three. She doesn't eat anything.

Dad: They're both very petite. But I heard that Victoria's dad was there.

Mom: Uh huh. And he ate like a big boy. (Laughs).

Dad: (Unintelligible).

TC: See, he ordered like a shrimp...a xxx salad...a little tiny what's it called?

Mom: The eggrolls.

TC: The eggrolls.

Dad: You guys...you guys had dinner with him?

TC: He paid for Tori's dinner.

Mom: I know. We got there. They were just in front of us and I said, "No. I'll pay." And he said, "No, no, no, no, no."

Dad: Well, you would have said, "I'll tell you how you need to pay. You get your car. Take my son for a drive around the block and come back. That's the pay." Eh? No?

Mom: No. (Laughs).

Dad: That's not enough?

TC: But you could have still hear how he was English.

Mom: Why? I couldn't hear anything.

TC: I could hear a little bit of an accent. I was sitting right next <to him.

Dad: He speaks> English, yeah?

TC: I mean you can't notice it if you're like standing, you know, like me and <dad's distance.

Sib I: No, no. I was sitting> in front of him. I was sitting in front of <him.

TC: Like, here in front> of him, you won't hear it as well. But if you're next to him, you'll really hear it. I can hear it.

Mom: You can hear the English accent?

TC: Yeah.

Mom: At what stage did he come to this country?

TC: I don't know. I could still kind of hear it. Can't you?

Mom: No.

Dad: Like in Brian Hale's?

Mom: <No. no.

Sib I: Oh, no, no, no. >

Mom: I think uh the-the Hale girls, even though they were born here, have more...they think they have a more of an English <accent...

Dad: Oh yeah.

TC: Uh huh.

Mom: ...than Victoria's dad.

Dad: Helen (unintelligible). Helen speaks very...

Mom: She tries.

Dad: I went to Kelly's class today. <I was introduced...I was introduced as...
TC: She tries to be all, > like, you know, she thinks that... She tries to be all cool and everything. And she wears like shirts that people don't even wear these days. They're like little fourth graders don't wear them that way. (Unintelligible) like that with a big bow right here. (Unintelligible).
Mom: Hm.
Dad: (Spanish). You know, uh, I went to Kelly's class today. I was introduced as the father of Visinte and Victoria.
Mom: Did they know who...who you were?
Dad: Yeah.
Mom: They knew who they were?
Dad: They know who the kids were. They didn't know who I was.
Mom: There were no kids that were in their class?
Dad: Yeah. Yeah. There was one of them. <I didn't...
TC: The teacher probably knew.>
Dad: I didn't know the kids, but I knew some of the students uh...there was a father...the-the son of...the daughter of Xxxx.
Mom: Uh huh.
TC: Do you know Keisha, the other teacher that's teaching?
Dad: I didn't know her, but I met her today.
TC: Isn't she nice?
Dad: Where does she come from?
TC: Uh...oh, I think she's from New York. I think so, but I don't know. But when she was little, you know what she wanted her name to be?
Mom: What?
TC: New York. <She wanted to be called New York.
Mom: New York? > <New York as opposed to Keisha.
Dad: (Unintelligible). >
Mom: That's a strange um idea.

This excerpt highlights how family identities are formed in contrast to other families and in relation to place of origin. The conversation begins with a story being told about a dinner out with another family, but quickly moves into a discussion of the individual characteristics of one of these family members, and how this is the same and different from yet another family (and implicitly from the family telling the story). All of this focuses on where these individuals come from (England) as an important part of their identity and how it is expressed. The father tries, at first unsuccessfully, to transition into a new story of what happened that day when he visited Kelly's classroom, although it is not clear from this conversation who Kelly is (she is not one of the family members). The focus here is whether or not the people in the classroom knew whom the father was, meaning did they know who his children were, again focusing on identity as being defined through family relationships. Again, this conversation quickly turns to identifying where people are from and how this helps define who they are. The entire conversation revolves around forming identity based on place of origin and relationships to other family members, helping the child to understand his own identity as emerging from within his own family.

In all three examples, we see the complex interweaving of concrete discussions of food and family, of learning about the world, about others and about the self through discussing the

mundane events of the day, stories of family formation and history, and implicit and explicit lessons about historical and cultural identity. How might children's developing knowledge of their own families' stories relate to their sense of self and well-being?

Family stories and child adjustment

While one focus of the Family Narratives project was the nature of family narratives themselves (see Fivush, et al, in press), the second was the extent to which children become holders and carriers of their family stories. This was of interest because of our working hypothesis that children who have knowledge of their family's stories and the continuity that such knowledge engenders will be 1) better adjusted; 2) be part of families that function better; and 3) will be more resilient in the face of usual (e.g., social and school problems) and unusual (e.g., 9/11) life stresses. To test these notions, a set of well-established family function measures was used (McCubbin & McCubbin, 1988). In a rather sad instance of serendipity, all of the baseline data on 30 of our 40 families had been gathered prior to 9/11. As such our ongoing follow-up visits with these families took on special significance since they had now become part of a naturally occurring experiment in which all of them had been exposed to the same stressor at the same time, thereby allowing us to explore their actual resilience, coping, and adjustment behaviors with a level of stimulus control rarely possible in past studies of family functioning and resilience.

Measures of individual and family function

In addition to taping of family narratives and dinnertime conversations, seven well-established measures were used: 1) The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE); 2) The Family Life Inventory of Life Events (FILE); 3) The Family Hardiness Index (FHI); 4) The Family Functioning Scale (FFS); 5) The Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL); 6) The Nowicki-Strickland Locus of Control Scales (ANSIE/CNSIE) and 7) The Do You Know...? questionnaire. All measures were completed independently by the mother, the father, and the target child.

1. *The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE)*. While originally designed as a Guttman scale, the RSE is now commonly scored as a Likert scale. The scale is designed to measure feelings of self-worth and the ten items are answered on a four-point scale (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree). The scale generally has high reliability: test-retest correlations are typically in the range of .82 to .88, and Cronbach's alpha for various samples are in the range of .77 to .88. The RSE is associated with many self-esteem related constructs, such as confidence and popularity. Furthermore, considerable discriminant validity has also been demonstrated for the RSE. (Rosenberg, 1965).
2. *Family Inventory of Life Events and Changes (FILE)*: The Family Inventory of Life Events and Changes (FILE) is a 71-item, yes/no, pencil and paper instrument that assess chronic and recent life stress. The FILE measures family stress in nine areas: intra-family strains, marital strains, pregnancy and childbearing strains, finance and business strains, work-family transitions and strains, illness and family care strains, losses, transition in and out, and family

legal violations. Family members indicate whether particular stressful events have occurred in their family. The overall Cronbach's alpha for the FILE is .72 indicating high reliability. Similarly, test-retest reliability was also acceptable and ranged between .72 and .77. Internal consistency for the FILE ranges from .79 to .82. Moderately high correlations between the FILE scale, Intrafamily Strains, and indices of family functioning support the construct validity of the FILE (McCubbin, Thompson, & McCubbin, 1991).

3. *Family Hardiness Index (FHI)*: The FHI was developed to measure the characteristics of hardiness as a stress resistance and adaptation resource in families, and to adapt the concept of individual hardiness to the family unit. This 20-item questionnaire consists of three subscales measuring commitment, challenge, and control. Families respond to items on a 3-point scale ranging from 0 (False) to 3 (True). The overall internal reliability for this scale is .82. The internal reliabilities for the three subscales (Commitment, Challenge, and Control) are .81, .80, and .65, respectively. The test-retest reliability for the Family Hardiness Index is .86. To establish validity, the relationship between the FHI and Family Flexibility, Family Time, and Routines, and Family Satisfaction, Marital Satisfaction, and Community Satisfaction was examined. Results indicate significant positive correlations (McCubbin, et al., 1996).
4. *Family Functioning Scale (FFS)*: The Family Functioning Scale (FFS) is a 40-item questionnaire measuring family functioning. Each statement is rated on a Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Never) to 7 (Always). The FFS contains statements assessing family affect, family communication, family conflicts, family worries, and family rituals/supports (Tavitian, Lubiner, Green, Grebstein, & Velicer, 1987). The internal consistency for the FFS is fair, with alphas that range from .90 for the positive family affect subscale to .74 for the conflicts subscale. Correlations reveal good concurrent and discriminant validity (Tavitian et al., 1987).
5. *The Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL/4-18)*: The Child Behavior Checklist is designed to record children's competencies and problems as reported by their parents. The 20 competence items obtain parents' reports of the amount and quantity of their child's participation in sports, hobbies, games activities, jobs and chores, and friendships; how well the child gets along with others and plays and works alone; and school functioning. Each of the 118 specific problem items and two open-ended problem items are scored on a 3-step response scale. This measure consists of 8 scales assessing somatic concerns, anxiety/depression, attention, social problems, thought problems, delinquent behavior, and aggressive behavior. Intraclass correlation coefficient for the 20 competence items is .927 and .959 for the 118 specific problem items (both $p < .001$). For the 20 competence scales, test-retest reliability is .996 and .952 for the specific problem items (both $p < .001$). Construct validity is supported by numerous correlates of CBCL scales and nearly all CBCL items discriminate significantly between demographically matched children. (Achenbach, 1991).

6. *Adult Nowicki-Strickland Internal-External Locus of Control (ANSIE) and the Children's Nowicki Strickland Locus of Control Scale (Ages 9- 18)*: These 40 item scales were designed to assess locus of control of reinforcement. Locus of control is defined as the perception of a connection between one's action and its consequences. People with higher scores (external control) tend to believe that what happens to them is the results of luck, fate, powerful others, or forces beyond their control. Conversely, those with lower scores (internals) tend to believe that they in some significant way affect what happens to them. There is extensive research on reliability and validity for the ANSIE and the CNSIE. (See Duke and Nowicki, 1973; Nowicki and Duke, 1974; Nowicki and Strickland, 1973.)
7. *Do You Know...?*: The Do You Know...? Scale (DYK) measure is a 20-item yes/no questionnaire that assesses an individual's knowledge concerning his/her parents and family. This particular measure was generated for this study. As such, reliability and validity estimates will be calculated and provided following data collection. Since DYK is a scale not available elsewhere, it is included here on Table 1.

Initial findings

To assess the association between children's knowledge of family history as measured by the "Do You Know...?" scale (DYK) and their perception of family functioning, several correlational and regression analyses were conducted.

The correlation between DYK scores and Family Functioning Scale as rated by the child was significant ($r = .367, p = .015$). This positive correlation suggests that the more knowledge children have of their family, the higher children rate overall family functioning. How much children know about their family's past appears to also be associated with locus of control. Results indicated a significant negative correlation between DYK scores and locus of control ($r = -.420; p < .005$). More internally controlled children, as indicated by lower scores on the CNSIE, achieve higher scores on the DYK scale. It has been suggested that self-esteem seems to buffer children against the negative impact of external stressors. Among the numerous protective factors that serve to moderate the effects of stress and foster resilient beliefs and attitudes in children, self-esteem appears to play a focal role. Therefore, it is of interest to explore possible significant associations between a child's knowledge of family history and self-esteem. To assess this relationship, correlation analyses were conducted between the DYK scale and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, with the resultant $r = .360 (p < .016)$.

Given the significance of the associations, the next logical step was to examine the predictiveness of the DYK scale for family functioning, resiliency, and coping mechanisms in children and families. Results indicated that the DYK scale significantly predicted family functioning as rated by the child. In other words, children's knowledge of their family history significantly predicts children's ratings of family functioning. ($[F(1,30) = 7.729, p < .01]$). Results indicated further that children's knowledge of family history accounts for approximately 21% of the total variance in family functioning. Additionally, the DYK scores significantly predicted children's locus of control as measured by the CNSIE, $F(1,30) = 7.625, p < .011$. Locus of control appears

to account for approximately 20% of the variance in family functioning. Furthermore, children's knowledge of family history combined with their locus of control scores appears to account for approximately 28% of the total variance in family functioning. The relation between knowledge of family history and self-esteem further suggests the pervasiveness of the DYK measure. Results indicated that DYK significantly predicted responses on the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale, $F(1,30) = 7.240, p < .013$. Although there may be potential mediators and/or moderators affecting the specific (directional) relations among these variables, these results suggest that there is a benefit of knowing family facts and past history. The DYK measure appears to significantly predict adjustment and resiliency in children facing external stressors.

Why are these findings so important?

The analyses reported here, indicating that there are significant correlations between the amount of family history known by a child (the DYK Scale) and that child's locus of control, level of self esteem, and perception of family functioning, are extremely exciting. Firstly, it is intriguing that such a simple thing as how much children know about their family history would not only be related to these other variables, but that it is related to such a significant degree. The modal correlation in the psychological literature between most any measure of personality or individual difference and any other is typically around .30, a figure which, when squared, tells us that the level of one of these variables can account for about 10% of the variance in the other. However with correlations such as those found here, ranging between the .4s and .5s, one can account for a much larger amount of variation, especially when variables are combined. Thus, by combining just the two variables of DYK and Locus of control, we have been able to account for 28% of the variability in children's perceptions of family functioning. This means that nearly one-third of perceived family level of functioning can be explained via knowing only the locus of control and how much children know about the history of their family. Clearly, chief among these means of transmission would be family meal conversations and informal conversations in car pools and on automobile trips, but we could add family reunions, family almanacs, camp meetings, wedding videos, family Bibles, Christmas and other holiday rituals and traditions, and any other activity or object that can be a carrier of historical information.

The second reason these findings are so important is the relation between DYK and Locus of Control. Being the subject of more than five thousand studies to date, locus of control may be considered a master variable in psychology. A master variable is a factor that has been shown to be related to so many other behavioral, emotional, and psychological variables that it may be considered a unifying, central concept. Other master variables would include intelligence, trust, introversion-extroversion, affiliativeness, and such. When something is shown to be related to a master variable, it is then known to be related to all of the other things that are related to that same variable. Thus, for example, vocabulary skill is known to be related to grades in school, but these are related to each other because they are both related to intellectual ability. Similarly, in our own data, family information is related to family functioning because both are also related to the master variable, locus of control.

When locus of control is seen as the hub of a wheel of interconnected variables, one can see why it is so important for a variable to be related to it. As locus of control changes, the effects of such change are distributed across a wide range of behaviors and other psychological variables and beyond them to all of the other variables with which they are connected. Further, given its location at the hub, a change in one of the peripheral variables (such as knowledge of family history) can have an effect on a child's locus of control which is then distributed back out to other peripheral variables causing them to vary as well (e.g., family functioning, self-esteem, etc.). It is for reasons such as this that the significant correlations among locus of control, DYK, family functioning, and self esteem found in this first phase of the Family Narratives Project appear to be so important.

Where do we go from here?

While our notion of locus of control as being a master variable at the hub of a host of intercorrelations allows us to use each variable as a significant predictor of the others, we have yet to determine the causal relations among them. In order to do this it will be necessary to carry out an intervention study in which knowledge of family history is used as an independent variable in a true experimental rather than quasi-experimental manner. In specific, we hope to perform an intervention study in which levels of family knowledge, locus of control, self-esteem, and family functioning are assessed at a baseline level. Following this, 50% of the family units will be taught and encouraged to increase their level of transmission of family history information at dinner conversations, during carpool transport and at other times when such communication is possible. At a subsequent time point, all measures would be re-administered with the expectation being that, along with increases in scores on the DYK measure there will be commensurate increases in internal locus of control, self-esteem, and family functioning. Such changes would not be expected in the families that were not encouraged to increase their degree of family history transmittal. While not definitive, data from an intervention study will provide a sense of the directionality of the relations among the variables that we have studied thus far in the MARIAL Family Narratives Project.

While the recommendation that family narratives be prescribed as a means of rendering children more resilient and internally controlled and of elevating the level of family functioning must await further support, one would not be remiss in suggesting that the salutary correlates of family knowledge are so strong as to argue for proceeding with caution. There seems to be no adverse correlate of DYK in our data set. It is only related to positive things—self esteem, internal locus of control, improved family functioning. There could be little harm in recommending, therefore, that families, especially working families whose time is so limited and whose stress level can be so great, try to emphasize their family narratives whenever they can. In the words of the first author, “as my grandmother, who came from Hungary and married a man from Poland and started a live poultry business in New Jersey and used to carry beer home in a kettle from the corner tavern and whose recipe for chicken soup I still have and use and who used to spell English words with a Hungarian accent and who baked my small breads shaped like birds with eyes made of whole cloves and whose spice box, now some 120 years old, sits on my kitchen counter and who embroidered and made lace and who

tried but failed to learn to play the violin as a child and whose sister was my favorite aunt and whose brother once worked for Jimmy Walker in New York City, would say, 'It couldn't hurt!'

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Table 1. The “Do you know...?” scale

Please answer the following questions by circling “Y” for “yes” or “N” for “no.” Even if you know the information we are asking about, don’t write it down. We just wish to know if you know it.

1. Do you know how your parents met?
2. Do you know where your mother grew up?
3. Do you know where your father grew up?
4. Do you know where some of your grandparents grew up?
5. Do you know where some of your grandparents met?
6. Do you know where your parents were married?
7. Do you know what went on when you were being born?
8. Do you know the source for your name?
9. Do you know some things about what happened when you brothers or sisters were born?
10. Do you know which person in your family you look most like?
11. Do you know which person in your family you most act like?
12. Do you know some of the illnesses and injuries that your parents experienced before you were born?
13. Do you know some of the lessons that your parents learned from good or bad experiences?
14. Do you know some things that happened to you Mom or Dad when they were at school?
15. Do you know the national background of your family (such as English, German, Russian, etc.)?
16. Do you know some jobs that your parents had when they were young?
17. Do you know some awards that your parents had when they were young?
18. Do you know the names of the schools your Mom went to?
19. Do you know the names of the schools that you Dad went to?
20. Do you know about a relative whose face “froze” in a grumpy position because he or she did not smile enough?